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Women and Children

FIRST

Women and Children *First*

BY SALLY BENSON

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This book is for

DUSTY

because nothing makes him cry

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Women and Children

FIRST

The Raffle

COUSIN MARGARET READE was Millie Osborne's mother's cousin. She was the only one of the Tait girls who had done really well for herself, and she hadn't had a care in the world since she married Harry Reade. Cousin Margaret and Cousin Harry lived in a large, rambling house, near Wethersfield, Connecticut, which had been built in 1895, and twice a year Millie Osborne was invited to visit them. She stayed a whole week in August and a weekend sometime during the winter. Once, twelve years ago, when Millie was twenty-five years old, Cousin Margaret had asked her for the entire summer and had even given a garden party in her honor, to which all the eligible bachelors in Wethersfield and Hartford had been invited. But nothing came of it, and Cousin Margaret, feeling she had done all that was humanly possible, had given up the idea of trying to make a match for Millie.

The winter visits were timed to suit Cousin Margaret's whims. And, although several times she had experienced slight qualms over Millie around Christmas, she stifled them, telling herself that her own boys, their wives, and five grandchildren were all that she could possibly manage and that Millie would understand. Then she would send Millie a prettily wrapped Christmas box containing a small gift and a home-made fruitcake and read Millie's effusive thank-you letter out loud to the family.

This year the invitation for the winter visit came in the nick of time for Millie. It arrived on the eighteenth of February, just when she was wondering how she could possibly manage until the first of March, when her check would come. She lived at the Allerton House in a ten-dollar-a-week room, and her room rent, which she paid in advance, was due Friday. She sat down and wrote a properly grateful acceptance to Cousin Margaret's kind invitation and, going down to the lobby, mailed the letter and told the room clerk that she would be giving up her room before noon on Friday. It was not until she got back upstairs and shook the contents of her purse onto the bed that she realized what she had done. There was a round-trip ticket to be bought; a box of Barracini chocolates to take to Cousin Margaret; taxi fare to and from the station; a dollar, at least, to be given to Hannah, Cousin Margaret's upstairs maid; and her room rent would still have to be paid when she returned to town on Monday. This, she figured, left a dollar and fifty cents to live on for almost a week. But it was too late to change her plans, because, no matter what happened to her, she could not afford to disappoint Cousin Margaret.

Millie was tired when she arrived at Cousin Margaret's house. Her train had not left New York until three, and, true to her word, she had been out of her room at the Allerton House before noon. She had checked her wardrobe trunk with the porter and, carrying her suitcase, rode up to the solarium, where she waited until almost train-time. The train trip was dull; it outlasted the time it took her to read the paper she had bought at the station, and the country through which she passed was too familiar to

give her any sense of adventure. Cousin Margaret, showing her to her room, was apologetic about the bureau drawers. She explained that Millie would have to get along with only the two top ones. "The bottom ones are full of linen," she said. "I didn't think you'd mind."

Millie told her she didn't mind the least bit. She thought of the large shining bathroom across the hall, which was for her exclusive use; of the huge, soft bath towels, the sweet-smelling sheets on her bed, and the old-fashioned elegance of Cousin Margaret's dinners.

"I hope you brought an evening dress," Cousin Margaret went on. "I meant to mention it in my note to you. Mrs. Fletcher is giving a charity ball at her home. For the British, you know."

Her voice, when she spoke of Mrs. Fletcher, was tinged with respect. There were only a few things in the world that Cousin Margaret did respect. They were the Republican Party, her husband, her own blood pressure, the British Empire, and Mrs. Fletcher. And to have Mrs. Fletcher working hand in glove with the British Empire, so to speak, gave her a feeling of awe. Mrs. Fletcher was married to a man who had twice as much money as Mr. Reade, and while Mr. Fletcher had had to work for his and her own husband had conveniently inherited a fortune, the difference in the totals was annoying. Mrs. Fletcher had a larger house and, thanks to a superb gardener, took more prizes than Mrs. Reade did at the Garden Show; Mrs. Fletcher was three inches taller and had kept her figure, and her husband was chairman of the board of directors at the country club, while Mr. Reade was only secretary.

"A dinner dress won't do," Cousin Margaret said. "I have already bought your ticket—two dollars—and even if you can't go, I'll have to keep it. It would never do to return it for an affair of this sort."

Millie Osborne laughed reassuringly. "Dear Cousin Margaret," she said. "Of *course* I have an evening dress. I wouldn't think of travelling without one."

"I'm very glad of that," Cousin Margaret said. "Young people are so careless these days that one never knows."

Although Millie Osborne was thirty-seven, it did not seem strange to have Cousin Margaret refer to her as a young person.

"I wish I'd thought of it. The idea for the ball, I mean. Not that Carrie Fletcher's house won't *do*, but, if I do say so myself, I know how to handle a thing of this sort."

"Indeed you do, Cousin Margaret," Millie said. "I think I've been to more lovely parties in this house than in any place in the world. I shall never forget the tea you gave last winter for Martha Douglas."

"I should think not," Cousin Margaret said.

"When is the ball?" Millie asked.

"Tonight, naturally," Cousin Margaret said. "Carrie Fletcher would never dream of letting the dancing run over into Sunday. I shall only stay until after the raffle. I have five books of tickets."

"You're *too* generous," Millie Osborne murmured.

"Yes," Cousin Margaret said. "Carrie Fletcher has three. I thought it a little odd when she told me, considering the fact that the prizes were contributed. Everyone was most kind. Mrs. Goldhamer, who runs the Variety Store, gave a lovely pair of blankets. Mr. Harris gave a nice little

portable radio—he has the radio shop, you know. And Miss Hultgren, at Rita's Beauty Shop, gave a fifteen-dollar permanent wave. There are six prizes in all. I believe the others are a cocktail-shaker or some such nonsense, and an electric clock, and a pair of bookends. I have my heart set on the blankets."

"Oh, I *do* hope you win them, Cousin Margaret!" Millie said. "And you should, with five books."

"There are six tickets in each book," Cousin Margaret said. "And, as each ticket is twenty-five cents, it *would* come to a dollar and a half, only Carrie Fletcher thought some concession should be made to persons generous enough to take a whole book. So she decided to sell the books for a dollar and *twenty-five*." She walked over to the bureau and moved a pale-blue pincushion to the exact center of the heavy white linen bureau scarf. "Harry won't be going," she went on. "The noise bothers him. And I would have asked someone to take you, but I just couldn't seem to think of any unattached man."

"It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all," Millie Osborne said. "We'll just have a nice little time all by ourselves. And you really must let me pay you for my ticket."

"No," Cousin Margaret said. "That is my treat. However, if you feel you would like to do *something*, as I know you do, you may buy a book of tickets for the raffle. I was sure you would want one, so I got an extra one from Carrie Fletcher."

"Why, of course!" Millie Osborne said. She opened her purse and took out a dollar and a quarter and handed it to Cousin Margaret.

"There will be other things, too," Cousin Margaret said.

"So you must be sure to carry a little something with you. I believe the punch is to be fifty cents a glass, and cigarettes will be thirty-five cents a package. Little things of that sort. I feel it's the least we can do."

"Oh, it *is!* The very least!"

"Well"—Cousin Margaret gave a sharp glance around the room to see if everything was in order—"I'll leave you to your unpacking. Dinner at seven sharp."

When Cousin Margaret had left, Millie Osborne closed the door and opened her suitcase. She arranged her clothes neatly on the chintz-covered hangers in the closet; there was the black lace evening dress that doubled so admirably as a dinner dress when worn with her long-sleeved velvet jacket, a short tweed skirt to be worn with sweaters, a dark-brown afternoon dress with a V neck, and her black coat with the real mink collar. Cousin Margaret had sent her the skins, smelling strongly of moth balls, two years ago and Millie Osborne had had them cut into a smart little collar for her coat. There had been enough fur left over to have a hat made to match.

After she had finished unpacking, Millie opened her purse. There was a ten-dollar bill, a one-dollar bill, and a twenty-five-cent piece in it. She took out her needlepoint evening bag and tucked the money into its small change purse. As she did so, she considered leaving her bag behind in the bureau drawer and telling Cousin Margaret that she had completely forgotten it. But instantly she knew that Cousin Margaret would only offer to lend her the money and would remind her of it the next day. She shut her eyes and tried to imagine what it would be like going

back to New York with not enough money for her room rent, and her explanations to the clerk at the desk. She might, of course, go to the Y.W.C.A., but there was her mail, which would come to the Allerton House, and her friends, who would telephone her there. For the first time in her life she experienced a sensation that approached panic. And although she reminded herself that her check would come, as it always did, the first of the month, which was only eight days away, her sense of insecurity grew. She thought with longing of her room at the Allerton and wished passionately that she were back there. She could have managed. If she slept later in the mornings, her breakfast would do until tea, which was served free to guests. And there was always the possibility of a dinner invitation. She had never been hungry in her life. It did not seem possible that she ever would be.

She bathed and dressed hurriedly and walked down the broad, polished stairs to the library. Cousin Harry sat listening to the radio, and she went over and kissed him on the cheek. "Well, Millie," he said. "I forgot you were coming." He settled back in his chair and closed his eyes.

She took her knitting from the bag she was carrying and sat down on the sofa. It was dark in the room and, aside from the noise of the radio, still. The lamp on the table by the couch was too low and its dull, rose-colored shade was too heavy. She knitted inexpertly and counted her stitches often. When she heard Cousin Margaret come into the room, she arose.

"Well, Millie," Cousin Margaret said. "You look very nice. Very nice indeed. Is that your black lace dress?"

"It packs so beautifully," Millie said.

"Black is always good, although it makes you look a little pale."

Dinner seemed endless. Millie drank at a gulp the glass of wine which she usually sipped with enjoyment, and she saw Cousin Margaret raise her eyebrows slightly. "This is one of our own turkeys," Cousin Margaret said.

"It's delicious," Millie told her. "Delicious."

"*We* think so. We think nothing tastes as fine as our own birds. Don't we, Harry?"

Mr. Reade looked up from his plate. "What's that?" he asked.

"I was just saying to Millie that nothing seems to taste as fine as one of our own birds," his wife said.

After dinner, Cousin Harry went to his study and closed the door, and Cousin Margaret and Millie sat in the library knitting until it was time to go to the dance. When Cousin Margaret heard the car draw up and stop under the porte-cochère, she put her knitting away and stood up. "Come, Millie," she said. "Get your wrap."

Millie went upstairs and took her coat with the mink collar from the closet and put it on. Cousin Margaret frowned when she met her in the hall. "You can't wear that," she said. "It's too tailored. Didn't you bring an evening wrap?"

"No," Millie answered. "I didn't. It was stupid of me, but my bag is so small."

"Well," Cousin Margaret said. "You'll have to wear my mandarin coat. Run up and get it. You'll find it in my closet, to the far right."

The mandarin coat was too short and the silk felt cold against Millie's bare arms. In the car she sat huddled in

one corner and held the coat closed around her throat. "The drawing's to be at half past ten," Cousin Margaret said. "We'll find a nice, cozy corner. But first we'll look at the blankets. I want you to see them. They're homespun, from Nova Scotia."

Mrs. Fletcher's house was brilliantly lighted, and they could hear the orchestra playing as they walked up the front steps. In the hall near the door stood a long table, its top covered with things for sale: cigarette cases, compacts, and pins, all marked with the British seal. Cousin Margaret stopped to look at them. She picked up one of the pins and held it against her coat. "It's really very pretty, isn't it?" she asked. "And only two dollars."

She put it down on the table and fished in her bag. "Here's your ticket, Millie. And here's mine."

Millie took the pin from the table again. "You must let me, Cousin Margaret," she said. "After all, you did pay for my ticket."

"Well, yes, I did," Cousin Margaret said. "But I don't want you to feel you *have* to." She opened her coat and fastened the pin to the shoulder of her dress.

Millie handed her ten-dollar bill to the young woman in charge of the table and stuffed the change into her bag.

The double doors between the dining room and the living room had been thrown open to make room for the dancers. Mrs. Fletcher sat on a gilt sofa at the far end of the dining room. A little distance in front of her was the table which held the prizes and a large wicker basket full of cardboard slips for the drawing. Cousin Margaret and Millie made their way around the side of the room to where she sat, and Cousin Margaret greeted her affectionately,

stooping to kiss her on the cheek. "What a lovely party, dear Carrie!" she said. "Lovely!"

"Lovely!" Millie echoed. "All the girls in their pretty dresses."

Mrs. Fletcher smiled at them complacently. "It does look nice," she agreed. "I do think Robert's little girl looks so sweet in her costume." She pointed to a child, dressed in pantalettes, a poke bonnet, and a crinoline gown, who was selling cigarettes from a tray.

"She's a beautiful child," Cousin Margaret said. "Millie, as you're the only smoker here, you must buy some cigarettes from her."

The cigarettes were thirty-five cents.

Mrs. Reade sat down and settled comfortably back on the couch. "I do love to see young people dancing," she said. "When is the drawing, Carrie dear?"

"Not until the last ticket is sold," Mrs. Fletcher answered firmly. She picked up a book of tickets from the table. "I have a whole book left. Why don't you take it, Margaret, and then we can start?"

Mrs. Reade's voice was equally firm. "I have five," she said. "You take it, Carrie."

"Oh," Mrs. Fletcher said. "I've bought and bought until I really don't see how I can give any more. I've taken a dozen compacts. I thought they would make sweet little Christmas gifts for next year, you know. And goodness knows how many pins! People have been so kind. Did I tell you that Joe Severino contributed all the ice? I thought, under the circumstances, it was unusually thoughtful of him."

"I'll take the book," Millie said suddenly.

The two old women looked at her, and she felt the impact of their pleasure. "Now, that's really sweet of you, Millie," Cousin Margaret said. She turned to Mrs. Fletcher. "Millie has bought one book already, and this dear little pin for me."

Mrs. Fletcher got up heavily. "Now we can begin the drawing," she said. She walked over and spoke to the orchestra leader. The music stopped and the drummer rolled his drums and brought his cymbals together with a crash. Mrs. Fletcher waited until everyone in the room was quiet. Then she spoke loudly. "My dear friends," she said, "before we begin the raffle I would like to thank all those who have contributed their time and energies toward making this dance a success." She fumbled in her bag, brought out a list, and began reading from it. "First, I would like to thank the boys and girls of the Clinton School, who contributed their dimes and nickels and presented us with eighteen dollars and thirty-five cents for the relief fund." There was a sharp round of applause, and Mrs. Fletcher cleared her throat. "To the Boy Scouts, who gave us eleven dollars and twenty-one cents, and to the Girl Scouts, who donated six dollars, two beautifully knit sweaters, and six pairs of socks." She held up her hand as another wave of applause began. "To Hap Harvey's Merrymakers, who are providing us with such delightful music this evening at a nominal cost. To Bonoff's Liquor Store, who contributed so generously to the excellent punch, which I hope you will buy; to Joe Severino, who gave the ice for the punch; and to the town's storekeepers, Mrs. Goldhamer, Mr. Harris, Miss Hultgren, Mr. Rauss, Mr. Altheim, and Miss Robey, who

contributed the prizes which we will now raffle. I am going to ask my little granddaughter, Jean, to draw the numbers."

The effort of talking so loud had made Mrs. Fletcher's face very red, and she was puffing slightly as she walked back to the sofa. The basket containing the numbers for the drawing was covered and shaken thoroughly, and Jean Fletcher was blindfolded. There was a breathless silence as she drew the first number. Mrs. Fletcher took it from her and read it. "Number 729," she said. The room was still as people looked at their tickets. "Number 729," she repeated. "Who has the winning ticket for this pair of fine, homespun blankets?"

Millie Osborne gasped. "I have," she said.

A look of supreme annoyance flashed across Cousin Margaret's face. "Well, don't just sit there, Millie," she said. "Get up and take them."

Millie walked to the table and picked up the blankets. She bowed and smiled and carried them back to the sofa.

"Here," Cousin Margaret said, "I'll hold them for you. I must say I do think it's rather a shame *I* didn't get them when I had my heart set on them. With *five* books of tickets, too."

Millie's laugh was apologetic. "Why, I had no idea!" she cried. "I've never won anything in my life! I can't believe it!"

She leaned over and put one hand on the blankets, looking down at them. "I'm terribly sorry," she said. "I don't see why . . ." She raised her eyes. Cousin Margaret sat watching her eagerly. She looked, Millie thought, like a rather greedy old hen. Millie took the blankets from her lap and replaced them on the table. "I don't see why," she

went on, "I shouldn't give them back and let Mrs. Fletcher auction them off to the highest bidder."

Cousin Margaret's eyes were opaque and cold.

Millie smiled softly. "It will help a lot, dear Cousin Margaret," she said. "And it's for charity, you know."

Good-bye, Summer

THE post office was hot and smelled of dust, stale tobacco, and ink pads. Hand-painted posters announcing garden-club exhibits and amateur theatricals, bills with pictures and descriptions of men wanted for robbery or murder, and a warning against Japanese beetles were thumbtacked to the walls. Inside the door, old man Miner's ancient collie lay asleep, his gray coat matted and dull. He breathed unevenly, exhausted by his painful, sedate walk from Miner's house to the post office. Red had to step over him as he came in the door.

There were only two letters and a magazine in the Bascom box, all addressed to his mother. Red twirled the dial that locked the box and walked over to the window behind which Mr. Miner sat on a high stool. He propped one elbow in the opening and pushed his white yachting cap back on his head.

"How's a boy today?" he asked.

"Hello there, Red," Mr. Miner said. "You folks going to stay up late this year?"

Red yawned indifferently. "Looks like it," he answered.

"Thought it would be time for you to be getting ready for school," Mr. Miner said. "Must be pretty dull with most of the young people gone."

"Oh, them," Red told him disdainfully. "Bunch of nuts."

Mr. Miner smiled. "Your school open soon?" he asked.

"Opens next Tuesday without me," Red said. "I'm not going back. We're staying on a month and then going to Florida."

"Well, now." Mr. Miner frowned. "Didn't get into any trouble with your lessons, did you?"

"In that dump? I should say not!" Red's voice was scornful. "Say, listen, the dopes we had there didn't know from nothin'."

Mr. Miner picked up a stack of mail and began writing forwarding addresses on the letters. "Thought you liked that place," he said. "In Virginia, wasn't it?"

"Oh, it was all right, I guess," Red told him. "Good as any, which isn't saying much."

He straightened up and strolled over to read the notices on the bulletin board: Mrs. Sanders had lost a knitting bag, there was to be a church supper at the Methodist Episcopal Church on Wednesday, and the library announced that beginning the day after Labor Day it would not open until noon.

Red went outside and stood on the steps of the post office, staring blankly down the street. There had been a heavy mist in the night and the street was as wet as though it had rained. Steam rising from the asphalt was hot, pungent, and sickening, and the leaves of the elms were limp and faded. The place looked strange without the rows of cars filled with chattering women waiting in the shade for the mail to be sorted. The day lay before him, glaring and empty. From where he stood, he could see the roof of the Bascoms' house, a glimpse of red tiles and white stucco against the green of the trees. It was the largest house

in town, and people laughed at it. "Imagine building a thing like that in this sweet little place," they said, looking at its newness and whiteness with disfavor.

"Have you seen the inside of it? It's a *palace*," they said, choking with laughter, as though living in a palace were too funny for words. "It has *everything*, a *game* room, dozens of bathrooms all different colors, a bar, the most colossal living room, but *ghastly*, and she even has a little stage, a little theatre really, built on the top floor. A reminder, I suppose."

This last remark was a direct slam at Mrs. Bascom, who had been, the rumor went, a "Follies" girl. Not that the summer people at Monroe were fussy exactly, but they couldn't forgive Vic Bascom for daring to leave his first wife, Doris—who had been a little on the dull side but, well, a lady—for tall, red-haired Peggy Bascom. No one knew where he had met her, and for a year after they were married no one even knew she had a son, until Red appeared one day late in August fresh from a boys' camp and tougher than tripe. Everyone made it very plain to Vic Bascom from the start that he needn't try to force his new family down people's throats. And a gasp went up when he tore down the big, rambling, shingled cottage to build the new place, which was exactly the showy and pretentious sort of thing *she* would like. Every fall, Doris Bascom came back to town after Vic and Peggy had left. She stayed with friends, who were tactful and tried not to drive by the new house too often. Not that Doris ever said anything; she merely winced a little at the sight of the formal, clipped lawns where her old-fashioned garden had been. In fact, she always asked after Vic quite kindly, saying, "How's

poor old Vic?" And people told her that Vic wasn't looking any too well, small wonder, but that nobody saw him much.

When Red was first shown the new house, the station wagon with "Red Roof" in black letters on the side of it, the pale-green Lincoln roadster and the big maroon sedan, he was paralyzed. "Oh, boy!" he said. And when he was sixteen, Vic had taken him to get his license. But by that time he had learned that the huge house, the slick green roadster, and the way his folks did things were no good. His mother and Vic didn't seem to mind what people said. They kept the house filled with people they had met in Florida or people Peggy had known in New York, a noisy crowd in gay slacks and colored shorts, who sometimes dropped in at the dances at the club, a little too high and loud. They made fun of the summer people, calling them "pickle pusses" and "old battle-axes."

Occasionally, Red's mother worried about him. "Why don't you go to the dance, Red, honey?" she would ask. "Call up some nice little girl and ask her. You can have the big car—can't he, Vic?"

"Ask one of them dumb bunnies!" Red would exclaim. "Nothing stirring."

"*Those* dumb bunnies," his mother would correct him gravely. And Vic, watching him sharply, would put his hand in his pocket and slip him five dollars.

Red spent his time talking to the caddies at the club, driving furiously up and down the main road, hanging around the garage, and piloting his mother's friends around the lake in the little speedboat. At cocktail time, he took sips from people's glasses and got feeling a little good for a while, laughing hugely at jokes and telling some himself.

Then what was funny and what wasn't funny was clear again and he let himself go, while the women looked at one another and shrieked and the men laughed until they were red in the face and told him he was some kid.

It made him forget the time he talked to Mrs. Davenport in front of the post office. She had spoken to him so pleasantly that he had stopped by her car, and searching his mind for something to say that would entertain her, he had told her that he had seen the maids from the hotel swimming in the lake at night. "In their birthday suits," he explained.

"Oh, no, Red," she said. "I don't think they would do a thing like that. They probably had white bathing suits on. So many people wear them now, you know."

"Oh, no, lady!" he answered positively. "Not with them shadows!"

He laughed at his own humor, but Mrs. Davenport gave him a look that made him uncomfortable and embarrassed.

He was almost resigned to the fact that the young people in Monroe were apparently not for him, and he looked with contempt on the chinless youths who were his own age but seemed silly and vapid. Listening to the pungent swearing of the caddies, he was scornful of boarding-school accents, and the tales told him by Hank Dwyer, who worked at the service station down the road, were so filled with adventure and the goings-on of a girl named Rosie that almost anything else paled in comparison.

Yet it was a relief, when the summer people left this year, to be rid of trying to understand the split hairs of small snobberies. Things were simpler and he was no longer uneasily conscious of a life in which he had no part.

Standing on the steps, he made vague plans for the day;

he would take the car to be greased, have a double coke at Holbrook's, paddle over to the island. He was scarcely aware of the small car that drove up and stopped in front of the post office. He saw that the girl who got out was Betsy Davenport.

"Hi, Red," she called. "What are you doing, holding up the post office?"

"Somebody's got to," he answered, only mildly interested that she had more than addressed him.

She came slowly up the steps. "Hot," she said.

"As hell."

She stood near him and leaned against a support of the porch. She was small, plump, and pretty, and her voice was soft.

"It's awful, isn't it?" she asked. "With everybody gone, I mean."

"I like it," he said. "Nice and quiet without all that screeching."

She laughed as though he had said something very funny. "Well, it is, kind of," she agreed. "We're staying another week. I'll be late, but Mother wants to have some painting done." She wrinkled her forehead. "*Too* terrible, except for missing school, of course."

"I'm not going back," he told her. "Going to Florida."

"Not going to study at all?" she asked. "Goodness! What will you do?"

"Oh, it's great down there," he said. "Nice and warm all the time and nothing to do but lie around and have a time."

"It sounds perfect. You're *lucky*!"

"I'll say," he said.

"Nothing to do here now but write letters. I wrote ten

last night and I'm going to write ten or fifteen more today." She sighed. "I love to get letters, but I *hate* to write them."

His face brightened. "Why, so do I," he said, surprised. "Ain't that sumpin!"

He looked at her more closely. Her hair was short and curly, her lipstick red and glistening, and he decided that she wasn't dumb.

"No more dances," she said. "Not at the club, that is. And just one more at the Monroe House."

"Well, that don't kill me," he told her.

"Can't you *dance*?" she asked.

"Oh, I can dance, all right," he said. "I just don't see much to it. Kid stuff."

"You're awful. I bet you're just pretending you don't like it. You're probably awfully good." She studied him carefully, as though he were a race horse. "You *look* as though you'd be good. You've got the right build." She smiled at him. "It's fun when the music's good. Well, I suppose I might as well get the mail. That'll be *something,* anyway. Got yours?"

He folded the magazine around the letters so that she couldn't read the name on them. "Yep," he said.

He fanned himself elaborately. "Sure is hot. Like a coke?"

"I'd love a coke." She turned quickly and ran down the steps. "I'll get the mail later. Come on, I'm dying."

She climbed in his car and slid under the wheel. "Can I drive?" she asked. "I've been dying and dying to drive this car all summer."

He laughed tolerantly. "Sure, go ahead. Why didn't you say so sometime? I'd have let you drive it."

As they started down the road to Holbrook's, Red was elated. The calm of the morning was gone and it occurred to him that the car had never run so smoothly or felt so good. They drank their cokes slowly and then drove around the lake.

"You're O.K." Red said. "You drive O.K. This is a pretty heavy bus for a girl."

"It's gorgeous," she told him. "I love it. I could drive it forever and ever."

The road around the lake was shady and damp and there was a hot smell of pine needles. They passed the Monroe House, where a few elderly ladies sat and rocked on the porch. The sight of them made Red and Betsy laugh immoderately. "What a life!" Red exclaimed. "What a life!"

"Ghastly," she agreed. "I'd rather be dead."

"There's worse things than being dead," he told her sagely.

"Oh, yes," she said eagerly. "I hope I don't live until I'm old. I hope I die when I'm young. In my sleep."

"Yeah, that would be O.K."

They were in beautiful accord in their views on death, life, music, and the futility of study. And as they passed the Monroe House for the fourth time, Red asked her if she wanted to go to the dance there that night.

"That would be swell," she said. "There won't be anyone there much, but if it's too awful, we can leave and try to stir up something else."

It was after one when they drove back to the post office. "Almost forgot the mail," she told him. He drove home with this subtle compliment ringing in his ears.

His mother was not too surprised when he told her he

was taking Betsy Davenport to the dance. "That's lovely, honey," she said. "Don't forget to take a bath."

Waiting impatiently through the long afternoon, he wondered if he were in love. It must be love, he thought; that had sharpened his memory so that he could remember all the things Betsy had said. He wished that the dance were at the club and that he could dance with Betsy by the stag line. The color and tempo of his life were changed, and though almost everyone had left Monroe now, they would be coming back next year and for as many exciting and crowded years as he could count ahead.

It was dinnertime before Betsy told her mother she was going to the dance with Red.

"Red?" her mother asked. "That awful boy! Are you out of your mind?"

"He's not awful, he's nice," Betsy said. "I like him. I don't see anything awful about him at all."

"Well, maybe," her mother answered cautiously. "But, Betsy dear, you'll have him on your hands. Of course, we're going in a week. But next summer."

"Oh, phooey!" Betsy exclaimed.

"Well, think of me, child. I don't say the boy isn't all right, maybe, but his mother! I simply can't get involved with his mother. If you go out with Red, she'll think she can run in and out of here. And you can't blame her for that. Naturally, if you are friends with Red, she'll assume she can be friends with me."

It was almost eight when Betsy called him, and her voice sounded as though she were somewhere a long way off. "Red," she said. "I'm terribly sorry. I waited and waited, hoping I'd feel better, but I feel just ghastly. I must be

coming down with grippe or something. And I don't think I can make it. I really don't."

For a moment he stood holding the telephone, puzzled and lost, and then in a blinding flash everything was clear. "Sure, I know," he said with dignity. "It's O.K."

"I'm sorry," she told him. "Terribly sorry."

"Don't give it a thought," he said. "It's no skin off my elbow. Dancing don't mean that much to me. Hope you feel better."

Without saying good-bye, he put down the receiver. He reached for his yachting cap and took off his coat and got the car out of the garage. He backed down the driveway, whistling, slamming his brakes on at the foot of the hill, and grinding the gears as he changed from reverse to first.

He drove straight through Monroe and along the main road toward the next town, a drab, down-at-the-heels little place kept alive by a few stores, two movie theatres, and four eating places that sold drinks. Hank Dwyer waved to him as he passed the filling station, but he did not wave back. "To hell with him, too!" he said aloud.

He stopped the car in front of the Quality Lunch, lit a cigarette, and pushed open the screen door. It was Saturday night and the place was filled with men in overalls, eating and drinking beer. He sat down in one of the booths and called across the room. "Hi, Charlie! How about a little service?"

"Hi, there, Red!" Charlie called back. "What'll it be? Sandwich? Coke?"

"Double Scotch," Red told him.

Charlie came out from behind the counter and walked toward the booth. He leaned over Red and spoke softly and

confidentially. "Listen, boy," he said. "I'd like to, but I can't. Why, you ain't eighteen yet. And you know what will happen to me if I serve you a drink. Have a coke, Red."

"Coke, hell!" Red exclaimed. "Be a sport."

"I'd like to, Red," Charlie said. "I sure would like to, but I can't run the risk of having my license taken away. I can't do it, boy."

The men in the room were looking over at them and grinning. Red got up from the table and walked toward the door. He walked slowly, and as he passed the counter he took a toothpick from the glass holder.

"See you again, Red," Charlie called after him.

Red started the car and sat for a moment not knowing where to go. Then he drove toward home. He drove faster and faster until the accelerator was almost to the floor board, and although his eyes were reckless and wild and he told himself he wanted to die, some instinct made him slow down slightly when he reached the sharp turns in the road.

Birds in Their Nest Agree

MRS. ARMSTRONG moved the upholstered chair away from the radio and replaced it with the straight, high-backed one that stood in front of the desk. Although it was her intention to turn on the radio so low that she would be able to hear it only by sitting very close to it, she did not immediately do this. Upstairs, Anna was still moving about as she dressed and it would be some minutes before she would be ready to leave. She was running in to New York for the day to have lunch and dinner and then go to the theatre with Peggy Masters and her husband, who were in town for a week. It was not usual for Anna to be away from home a whole day, and Mrs. Armstrong wanted her to have a picture to carry away with her when she walked out of the house into the bright autumn sunshine: a picture of her mother, looking very tiny and forlorn, her shoulders stooped as she leaned forward trying to catch the faint notes of a radio program.

She began to wander aimlessly about the small, overcrowded room, noting with satisfaction that everything was in its place—the magazines in order on the gate-legged table, the plants watered, the tidies freshly pressed and neatly pinned to the plum-colored velvet of the chairs. The radiator was turned on, and with the sun pouring through the two front windows the room was very warm. The furni-

ture was too heavy and gave the impression of having occupied a more spacious place. There was precision in the way the ornaments were arranged, a mathematical accuracy possible only to a woman on whose hands time rested heavily.

Hearing Anna's heavy tread above, she frowned. It did not seem right that Anna should have grown from a pretty child to a large, robust woman of thirty. Practically overnight, it seemed, too. Thinking back to the days when she had been busy creating a home for her, and to the bustle and stir of a hundred small activities, she felt betrayed. She had neglected her own friends for the child, she reasoned. She had picked up the threads of her life after her husband's death and done everything for Anna. And there was nothing to warn her in those full days that one day it would all be over and she would become an elderly lady living in a mediocre suburb with her unmarried daughter. A faint hope lingered that this lull, this deadly lull, was only temporary. It seemed incredible that there was no child to get ready for school, no clock to watch so as to have lunch on the dot, no small clothes to wash. It had never occurred to her while Anna was growing up that a time would come when she herself would have to live with maturity.

She went over and sat in the chair, very still, her face curiously dead, as though for years no inner emotion had quickened it. She was so far away in some dim, confused past that she did not see Anna until she reached the foot of the stairs. At the sight of her, Mrs. Armstrong's mouth sagged a little at the corners and she seemed to become smaller.

Anna was looking well. She was a tall, thickly built woman, and she had about her a certain compactness. Her clothes were not smart, yet she was so neatly put together that she looked almost handsome in them. She had an unfortunate manner of addressing her mother, a teasing inflection in her voice, that had nothing light or humorous about it. "Well, am I all right?" she asked.

Mrs. Armstrong surveyed her critically. "I think your slip shows just a little, on the left."

Anna pulled at the shoulders of her dress and adjusted a strap. "Better?"

"I suppose so," her mother answered, and sighed.

A flicker of uneasiness crossed Anna's face. "I tell you what," she suggested a little hurriedly. "Why don't you put on your hat and coat and walk to the station with me? You can pick up something for your dinner on the way back, something you really like and not something you think I like."

For a moment Mrs. Armstrong did not answer. She looked out of the window into the golden sunshine and then she turned again toward Anna. A dreadful feeling of inertia filled the room. "I don't think I will," she said. "You run along."

In the bright light her hair shone white and soft, curling a little at the nape of her neck. Her hands were small, but they were the hands of a woman who relentlessly spared herself nothing; they showed faint signs of burns and the nails were cut short. Anna noted with a pang that the cuffs of her mother's dress were quite worn.

"I hate to leave you here alone," she said. "If I'd thought, I'd have asked Peggy if I could bring you. She wouldn't

have minded. I mean, she probably would have loved it."

Mrs. Armstrong's shoulders straightened slightly. "I can live without Peggy Masters," she answered tartly.

Anna moved her body impatiently. "Oh, Mother! Of course you can! I just thought it might be fun for you. You always liked Peggy."

"I don't like her and I don't dislike her," Mrs. Armstrong said. "I certainly don't *approve* of her."

Anna gave an annoyed little laugh. "Not *approve*?" she asked. "Well, that's the silliest thing I ever heard of! What on earth is there about Peggy not to approve *of*?"

Mrs. Armstrong groped in the jumble of her mind for an answer. "I may be old-fashioned," she said, "but I must say I don't approve of a woman who goes flying about the country and leaves her children with a hired nurse. It may be all very well, yet I assure you I wouldn't have done it."

"You might have been better off if you had," Anna said. The minute the words were out of her mouth, her face flushed and her lips moved as though making an effort to swallow what she had said. But it was too late.

Her mother made herself even smaller in the chair. "Yes, I suppose I've been a fool," she agreed.

"I didn't say you'd been a fool. You know I didn't."

"Not in so many words, maybe."

Anna glanced anxiously toward the clock and then back at her mother. She stood, hesitating and uncomfortable. "It's a lovely day," she said. "You oughtn't to sit here alone. Wouldn't you like to go to a movie or something?"

"No," Mrs. Armstrong answered. "No."

She turned and looked out the window once more. The day was so clear that everything outside seemed to be either

in bright sunlight or shadow. Even the people who passed the house had a definite, active look. Street sounds were sharp and pleasing.

Inside the room there was a close stillness which was not disturbed by the faint, feminine rustle of the two women.

"No," Mrs. Armstrong repeated. "I'll be all right. You run along."

Anna stood for a moment watching her mother sitting there in the sunlight, her hair white with faint tinges of yellow, two red marks on her small nose where her pince-nez pinched it, her eyes nondescript with the faded blue of age, her back a delicate curve, and only the faint movement of her feet betraying a constant and deep-seated impatience.

She began to pull on her gloves slowly. "Well, I better run along or I'll be late," she said. The animation that had been in her face when she came down the stairs was there no longer and her walk was heavier. She walked toward her mother and, stooping, kissed her lightly.

"Good-bye," she said.

She closed the front door gently and started down the walk. As she reached the street she turned and looked back at the window. Her mother had not moved and there was something about her immobility and the way the curtains framed her slight figure in its black dress that made her look not quite real but more like a painting of a mother.

Guest of Honor

THE sensation of waiting in a vestibule, listening for the clicking sound that told her the door was unlatched, was a familiar one. Rose Raleigh held out her hand in an anticipatory gesture, ready to grasp the knob and turn it. She always felt that once the clicking stopped and she had not turned the knob, the door would be closed to her forever and there would be no second chance.

In the hall, she stood a minute looking around her. It was close and there was a smell of dusty carpets, but the stairway with its elegant mahogany banisters, curved gracefully upward, and at the first landing there was a niche built in the wall, which held a blue pottery vase.

The Coles' apartment was two flights up, and although she had not come to see them since they had taken the place, the atmosphere was reminiscent. This time they were two blocks from Gramercy Square, not near enough to have a key to the park, not even near enough to see it. Three years ago they had lived a block and a half from the East River, and before that just a short walk from Washington Square, as though the magnet that pulled them to these localities was not strong enough to draw them to the desired center. And no sooner were they decently settled in a house with real possibilities, such as lovely high ceilings, stately marble mantelpieces, and hand carving over the doors, than the

building was torn down or remodelled into modern apartments.

Slightly out of breath from the climb, Rose Raleigh lifted the brass knocker on the door and let it fall. But after waiting a few minutes and getting no response, she rang the bell. Helena opened the door, kissed her hurriedly, and drew her into the hall, which was long and opened into a room at the end. She could hear a polite murmur of voices.

"Rose, darling," Helena said. "I was hoping you'd get here early so we'd have a little time to talk. How's Mart?" Without waiting for an answer, she went on, "I've asked just a few people. Nobody you know, I'm afraid. I tried and tried to think of some of the people we knew when you lived in New York, and I simply couldn't. The ones I remembered have moved away or we've lost touch with them somehow. But you're my guest of honor, you know."

"Oh!" Rose Raleigh exclaimed, pleased and embarrassed.

Helena's eyes were cool and appraising, and she made no effort to move away from the door. She wore a long, black house coat tied with a sash of Roman stripes, and her black hair was brushed back and fell to her shoulders.

"We never seem to see you any more," she said. "Never! I suppose Mart told you about seeing us when he was in town. We made him tell us all about you and how he liked living on the fat of the land with you making millions. How is the sweet thing?"

"Oh, he's fine," Rose answered. "Just the same."

"That's what Phil and I thought when we saw him. We thought we'd never seen anyone who had changed so little. He told us all about the new house. It sounds like a palace. Too marvellous!"

Rose Raleigh laughed. "Palace! It's very simple, really. Just a big living room, a library, dining room, kitchen, and my office downstairs, and the bedrooms and things upstairs. We made it as compact as we could and still—well, still have room enough to move around."

Helena leaned against the wall and stared at a spot just above Rose's head. "It sounds too grand," she said.

It was uncomfortable standing in the hall and Rose Raleigh wondered why, if she wanted to talk, Helena didn't ask her into her bedroom to sit down for a minute. "Mart and I were wishing that you and Phil would come up and see it soon," she said. "You could do what you liked, and there's a tennis court that will be quite good someday."

Helena's eyes were fixed and disinterested. "Darling, I'd love to if I can drag Phil away. Every minute he can spare, he runs up to our old shack in Connecticut. He's mad about it, although I can't see why. I think he and Mart planned to make a week of it up there soon. It *is* a wreck, of course, but you know how men love to go around looking like the wrath of God, and there *is* something to be said about not having to show up on time for meals."

Her voice was so doubtful that Rose Raleigh was silent, not knowing what to say.

As though she were waking with a start from a dream, Helena suddenly focussed her eyes brightly. "But I want to hear about you," she said. "And all your lovely tearooms that slave away for you while you butterfly around. There must be hundreds of them. Just like the A. & P."

"Quite a lot," Rose admitted. "They keep me pretty busy."

"Oh, of course. It must be a tremendous job. Every time

I pass one and see all the ladies from New Jersey eating their fill of those amazing desserts, I think how grand it must be for you. Every inch on a waistline is grist to your mill. And how is Mart doing? Or is he just basking, the lucky dog?"

Rose Raleigh laughed again, but her cheeks flushed slightly. "How silly! Mart works the way he always has. It doesn't make any difference—about what I'm doing, I mean."

"Oh, of course, not really," Helena assured her. "But you must admit he should be frantic with delight to have his wife turn into a wildly successful businesswoman with Rose Raleigh tearooms everywhere. Such a pretty name, too. How did you happen to think of it?"

"I don't know," Rose Raleigh answered. "I kept the Rose, and then I just happened to think of Raleigh. It sort of went with it and it sounded so much better than Rose Harris. Mart didn't mind."

"Now, *remind* me to introduce you as Rose Raleigh," Helena said, "or I shall forget and call you Mrs. Harris, and that won't mean anything to anybody. *Remind* me, now."

They stood smiling at one another. "I suppose we should be getting back to those people," Helena Cole said. "I suppose I shouldn't have asked them in the first place. It's so grand seeing you and there are so many things I want to hear about. I can't get over it, you of all people, except that you have always been interested in things like food. I can't see how you do it. Keep interested in it, I mean. I know I should go mad. If course, I've never cared what I ate."

She turned away abruptly and started down the hall.

Although there were only ten people in the living room, they had divided into three groups and were talking earnestly. They looked up, mildly interested, as Helena and Rose entered. Helena took Rose by the hand.

"I'd like you to meet my guest of honor," she said. "Mrs. Harris."

She murmured some names and Rose nodded her head brightly.

Helena dropped her hand suddenly. "What am I thinking of!" she exclaimed. "You haven't any drinks. Barney, help me, there's a dear."

She went to an oak court cupboard that stood against one wall. On the cupboard were several bottles of liquor, unopened, some glasses, and a bag of cheese popcorn. Opening the popcorn, she shook it into a bowl while the young man called Barney busied himself with bottles and glasses.

Left standing in the middle of the room, Rose Raleigh made her way to the couch. The minute she sat down, she wished she had chosen a chair instead. It was not really a couch at all, but merely a large double mattress set on box springs, so low that when she put her feet squarely on the floor her knees rose at an awkward angle almost under her chin. She tried leaning back, but the couch was too deep, and in her effort to rest on the pillows heaped against the wall she found herself in an undignified position, her skirt hiked up and her hat knocked down over her eyes. She pulled herself upright and sat stiffly, her legs crossed in front of her.

On her way to Helena's she had looked trim and smart in her new clothes, and she had noticed that people glanced

at her approvingly as they passed. Now, in this room, her neatness assumed a painstaking quality and she felt that the things she wore still bore the impersonal imprint of the store. The room had nothing definite about it. It was too long and narrow and gave her a transitory impression, as though she were waiting in a hall. In back of the couch, which was covered in dark-red velvet, hung a square of some handblocked material. A large, unframed still life was propped carelessly on the mantelpiece, and while there were only a few ornaments in the room, they had been placed with a casual air to their best advantage. It was obvious that the hand that arranged them was experienced in making the most of a meager assortment in difficult, uninspired settings. The fact that there were so few things scattered about gave each piece of furniture and each ornament a sort of preciousness out of proportion to its worth. It was as though they had survived other, less cherished possessions in hurried moves from place to place and by doing so had taken on an indestructible charm.

At the sound of a bottle opening, a large, heavy-set man got up from the floor, where he had been sitting. His face was flushed and his eyes were very clear and bright. As he moved, every eye in the room focused on him admiringly. "Here now, here now," he said. "Let me help."

"Oh, darling, no," Helena told him. "You sit still and let us wait on you. Really, Sam, you're terrible. Won't you be good?"

Sam's laughter was extraordinarily robust and hearty. "Don't baby me," he cried lustily. "Don't baby me."

He filled two glasses and carried them to the couch where Rose Raleigh sat. "For the guest of honor," he said.

Rose Raleigh took her drink and sipped it slowly. In a gulp, Sam drank half of his. "Can't let them make a baby of me, you know," he told her.

She looked at him inquiringly. "Heart trouble," he bellowed. "Haven't much longer to go. But I don't let it worry me. Mustn't get morbid."

"Oh," Rose Raleigh said sympathetically, and not knowing the technique of talking to someone who stood at death's door, she asked, "Angina?"

"No, no, nothing like that," he assured her happily. "Just a rather technical thing. Had an attack five years ago and have had to watch myself more or less ever since."

He drank the rest of his drink and filled his glass again. "Yes," he went on, standing in front of her, looking pleased, "I pride myself on living a completely normal life, except that I spend twelve hours a day flat on my back."

"He's amazing," Helena said. "Really amazing. But, darling, you must sit down. There's no sense in standing up and tiring yourself out for no reason."

He nodded brightly to Rose Raleigh and lowered himself to the floor again. No one spoke until he was safely settled, and then conversation started, steady and monotonous.

Helena chose one of the more comfortable chairs and leaned back lazily in it while the young man called Barney perched on the arm. She smiled across the room at Rose Raleigh. "Doesn't my guest of honor look sweet?" she asked. "She came all the way from Buffalo."

"Buffalo," Barney repeated in a voice that made Rose feel that she had walked the entire distance.

"We didn't know Barney when you lived here, did we?"

Helena went on. "He's one of our pets. We couldn't live without him."

"I couldn't live without you," Barney answered gallantly.

"Would you think that Rose Harris and I had gone to school together?" Helena asked.

He looked at Rose Raleigh, at her neat suit and small tailored hat, at her expensive, beautifully fitted shoes, and then he bent down and smiled at Helena. Her head rested on the back of the chair and her hair looked very black and soft. "You're not very much alike," he said. "Charming opposites."

Something about the way Helena accepted this seemed to take the charm for herself and leave the opposite to Rose. She sat quietly, her head still back, for a moment, and then she walked to the couch and sat on the very edge, facing Rose.

"There are a few people here I really want you to know," she said in a whisper. "There's Barney, of course. He has a book coming out this winter. Barney, come here."

He got up from the arm of the chair obediently. "I'm telling Rose Harris about your book," she said.

His face lit up with an inner light. "Oh," he said with animation. "Do you write?"

"No," Rose Raleigh told him.

"No," Helena repeated. "She doesn't write, but she does lots of marvellous things about money. Pass the popcorn, will you, darling, and see if anyone wants another drink."

"And there's Sam," she went on. "It's heart-rending, isn't it? All that vitality, and *for what?*"

"He looks *awfully* well," Rose said. "It's hard to believe."

Helena frowned. "He may look awfully well, but of

course he isn't. It's just that he's so damned brave about it. Just waiting. Then there's Paul Mallory. He's the one talking to the girl with the checked jacket. I really want you to talk to him. But people *will* get into little groups, won't they? When they know one another so well, I mean. I imagine it's the same everywhere. Buffalo and everywhere. You must tell them about yourself. They'll be fascinated." She looked across the room at a small gilt clock on the mantel. "Goodness!" she said. "It's after six. Don't say a word, but I'm going to slip into the other room and dress. I made a dinner appointment ages ago. It was stupid of me and I should have called it off."

"Oh," Rose Raleigh said. She sat up straighter, as though she were about to get up. "I'd better run along then."

"Nonsense!" Helena exclaimed. "You stay where you are and have a nice time. These people will stay for hours. I'll just slip out and get ready. Now, when you want another drink, *ask* for it. Have you cigarettes?"

She leaned over and kissed Rose lightly on the cheek. For a moment there was a flash of something like affection in her eyes. Then she wrinkled her nose and gave a little sniff. "What a marvellous scent," she said.

A hard brightness came into her face and she took in every detail of Rose's complete orderliness. When she spoke, her voice had a brittle amusement. "Good-bye, darling," she said. "I'll try to call you tomorrow."

Rose Raleigh sat in the center of the couch, almost without moving. From time to time she lifted her glass to her mouth and took little sips of her drink. Occasionally she shifted her feet, so that she would not trip up anyone who walked in front of her. She listened to snatches of conversa-

tion that became louder after a while. She turned her head from one group to another, smiling, trying to look interested, but she could not put in a word. Every now and then someone would look at her and nod and smile, as though by listening she had come into the outside fringe of their consciousness. She watched with fascination the number and strength of the drinks Sam poured down with relish, noted with what admiration and tenderness his drinks were mixed and handed to him. The fact that he was waiting to die, waiting to die in public, brought him a sort of glory.

Her back was stiff from sitting on the couch. And she felt as though she were alone on a small island, or as though someone had dug a deep, invisible moat around her that separated her from the rest of the people in the room. Her feeling of isolation became so acute that she would have given everything she possessed in the world to be sitting on the floor with Sam, handing him his drinks and asking him over and over if he felt all right.

Retreat

ALTHOUGH the sign on the stone gateway read "Maplewood Farm," the place was obviously not a farm. There were no fields of corn or wheat, no outbuildings, and, more particularly, no comforting smell of cattle and hay in the air. The main house was of stucco and stone, and a driveway ran from the gates to the rear, where it circled and widened to form a parking space. Beyond this a wide lawn stretched to the edge of the woods straight ahead, to a group of stucco cottages on the right, and to a flower garden on the left, where rusty chrysanthemums and a few late pansies still bloomed. The trees on the lawn were large and well cared for. No dead branches showed through their bright, thin autumn leaves, and the cavities that time and disease had worn in their trunks had been treated and filled. Small tables, gay, striped-canvas chairs, and swings were arranged about the lawn, but they were unoccupied, and an atmosphere of futility hung over the entire place.

In her bedroom on the second floor of the main house, Marion Douglas took a soft-green cardigan sweater from the bottom drawer of her bureau and slipped it on. Her room was small and cheerful, with pink-and-white flowered paper on the walls and a dressing table that she had brought from home. The dressing table had gay, ruffled skirts of dotted swiss, and its top was crowded with perfumes,

creams, bath and face powders, six or seven small bottles containing various shades of nail polish, and a complete jade-handled manicure set.

Her window was open and she could see, more plainly now that most of the leaves had fallen, the dirt road that curved sharply downhill. In the field beyond, she caught a glimpse of scarlet sumac, fading clumps of yellow goldenrod, and deep-purple asters. She was smiling as she left her room and, catching sight of her face in the mirror, she noticed with satisfaction how well she was looking. She had allowed her straight, fine hair to grow and wore it brushed back from her forehead to a knot at the nape of her neck. She was thinner than she had been when she had come to Maplewood Farm, almost five months before, and her eyes were clear and not swollen from crying. Her skin showed a faint touch of powder and she used lipstick. There were fine, purplish-red veins high on her cheekbones.

In the hall, a middle-aged woman in a printed silk dress sat reading a book. "Good morning, Miss Davis," Mrs. Douglas said.

The woman looked up from her book and smiled. "Why, *good* morning, Mrs. Douglas," she answered. "Don't we look well this beautiful day! On your way to the studio, I suppose?" The tone of her voice had an upward lilt and carried a note of determined optimism.

"Yes, I thought I might as well."

"Now then, you can't fool me!" Miss Davis exclaimed. "I just bet you can't wait to finish the little Madonna. How is she coming?"

Mrs. Douglas frowned and shook her head. "I'm having

trouble with the blue in her robe. I'm terribly afraid it will turn darker when it's baked."

"Oh, I'm sure it won't!" Miss Davis said. "And if it does, you can try again. Try, try again, you know." She resumed reading. Her smile vanished abruptly and her face settled.

Mrs. Douglas walked down the wide, carpeted stairs to the hall. The door of Dr. Scott's office was open, and she saw that he was sitting at his desk, looking absent-mindedly out of the window.

"Good morning," she said.

He turned his head quickly. "Oh, good morning, good morning, Mrs. Douglas. Beautiful day, isn't it? Good to be alive a day like today."

"Yes, indeed it is," she said.

"On your way to the studio? How's the Madonna coming?"

"I'm a little worried about her," Mrs. Douglas said.

"She'll turn out all right," he said. "Just you wait and see. Why, yesterday Mrs. MacLaren was about ready to give up doing her rug, and today she told me she'd fixed it. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Douglas said.

"That's good! That's fine!" His gaze wandered once more toward the window.

Mrs. Douglas walked through the cool, dark sitting room with its comfortable couches and open fireplace to a passageway that led to a side door. To the right of the door, a dark, competent-looking young man sat at a switchboard.

"Hello, Harry," she said.

"Morning. One swell day, isn't it?"

"Beautiful," she agreed. She stopped for a moment to

look at the announcements that had been thumbtacked on the bulletin board. The guests of Maplewood Farm were informed that a group of Negro singers would entertain them in the Recreation Room on Wednesday, October 30th; that there would be a fancy-dress ball in the Recreation Room Saturday, November 2nd, from eight to eleven; that guests wishing to play contract from four to six on weekdays would kindly hand in their names to Mrs. Tennant before noon each day.

Although she had read the same announcements for the last week, she reread them leisurely. Then, pushing the screen door open, she stepped out onto the path. The late October sun was almost hot as she walked down past the group of stucco cottages. She was later than usual and the cottages were deserted. There were four bedrooms, a bath, and a small sitting room in each cottage, and some people preferred them to the main house, when they were allowed a choice. Far back in the woods, she could see Bardwell Hall, where she had been placed on her arrival at the farm. She remembered her narrow room—a hospital room, really—and the quiet ruthlessness of Miss Frank, her nurse. In Bardwell Hall the nurses wore uniforms. It was only in the main house and in the cottages that they wore their everyday clothes. Dr. Scott had told her the reason for it the day he told her that she must not think of herself as a patient any more. "You are our guest, Mrs. Douglas," he had said. "And we want you to feel at home. We want you to feel free to come and go as you please around the grounds, and if you would like to drive to the village to have your hair done or do a little shopping, just let Mrs. Tennant know, and she will arrange for a taxi and ride in

with you." He laughed pleasantly. "Ladies have their vanity, you know."

He studied her sharply. "Miss Davis is in charge of your floor."

"Oh," Mrs. Douglas said. "But she—"

"I know. We found that so many of our guests felt that uniforms were unnecessary that we decided not to use them. Besides, we don't want you to think of Miss Davis as a nurse. Just believe that she is there to make you more comfortable. Now, this afternoon Dr. Andrews will have a little talk with you, and then we'll have an idea of what you like to do. Have you any hobbies?"

"No," Mrs. Douglas answered.

"That's too bad. We all should have a hobby. We'll see if we can't interest you in one."

No, Mrs. Douglas thought, hurrying past the path that led to Bardwell Hall, she had never had a hobby, unless you could count running a big house in Scarsdale a hobby, or driving young Pete and Larry and Jeanie to school every morning. Such things were not like collecting stamps or knitting socks for the Red Cross, but they took one's time just the same. After the marketing was done for the day, you found you'd spent the entire morning at the A. & P. Then there was Jeanie home for lunch, and the afternoons that flew by, there was so much to do: golf or bridge at the club, lunches and matinées in New York, hairdressers and shopping, clothes to buy for Jeanie and the boys, and her own clothes to attend to. Then there were the evenings with big Pete, who was tireless in his search for things to do. She had been busy, rushed, and important. Leaving it all had made her hate the farm at first, and although she

assured herself that she felt perfectly well physically, she had cried for two whole weeks.

At the end of the row of cottages there was a path that led through the woods to the studio. Miss Dodge was in charge of the studio. She was a slender, blonde girl who wore a smock, and she helped those guests of Maplewood Farm who felt inclined to model small figures, animals, ashtrays, or bookends out of clay. Mrs. Douglas had been at the farm three weeks before she visited the studio, and she still remembered how strange it had looked to her; there had been the statues of girls with leaves in their hair, their fingers and toes turning into branches, that sad, dark-eyed Carter Jones had done; there had been the dozens of horses and the minute ashtrays made by Mrs. MacLaren. There had also been paintings, mostly half finished, of sunsets, sunrises, still lifes, and others that merely expressed an emotion. They had made Mrs. Douglas laugh. "I could do better than that myself," she said, "and I've never had a lesson in my life."

"Why don't you?" Miss Dodge asked.

Before Mrs. Douglas knew what she was doing, she had started on a still life—a pewter vase filled with forsythia. It turned out far better than she expected, in fact was so good that Dr. Andrews asked if he might have it to hang in his sitting room. The night she finished it, she slept really well for the first time in weeks. After that she painted fifteen more pictures, and everyone agreed that she had a definite style. Then she took up modelling, starting with a pair of modernistic bookends and gradually working up to figures. She found she rather liked doing them, and, after all, it was better than sitting all day long in a canvas chair

on the lawn, thinking of home, worrying about Jeanie, who was only eight, until the tears started and her eyes ached.

She became scornful of the less-talented guests who spent their days in the weaving shop, making scarves and rugs on the hand looms. "It's all right, I suppose, if you can't do anything else," she confided to Miss Dodge. "But it does seem as though almost anyone could push threads in and out of those things. Why, my Jeanie did things every bit as good in kindergarten."

The studio door was open and Miss Dodge was poking at the fire in the kiln. Mrs. Douglas could see Carter Jones' legs below the edge of a screen that stood in one corner. He always worked behind a screen. She took her smock from its hook and walked over to the table where she had left her Madonna. The Madonna's hands were lifted in prayer, but her body was bent in submission.

"I've been looking at her all morning," Miss Dodge said. "She's quite the best thing you've done. I would have put her in myself, but I thought you'd like to be here at the ceremony."

"She isn't too bad," Mrs. Douglas said carelessly. But when she looked at the figure, her heart raced and her cheeks flushed with excitement.

When the oven was ready, Miss Dodge lifted the Madonna in and closed the door.

"I don't suppose there's much use in my hanging around," Mrs. Douglas said. She lit a cigarette, her eyes anxious. "I may go back for the mail and stop around here just before lunchtime."

"Why don't you?" Miss Dodge agreed. "It's such a heavenly day."

As Marion Douglas walked through the woods toward the main house, she remembered that tonight was the night for Pete to call. He called just once a week, because, as Dr. Scott had explained, sometimes one needed a rest even from one's own family. Failing to realize that, he added, would be unfair to the family as well as to herself, as he hoped she would see. He was referring, she knew, to the scene she had made the night they had moved her from Bardwell Hall to the main house. There was a telephone in every room in the main house, and she had thought her heart would burst when she saw the one on the table by her bed. By lifting the receiver, she could call Pete and talk to little Pete and Larry and Jeanie. She closed the door of her room and lifted the phone. Harry at the switchboard answered and she gave him her home number. There was a long silence while she waited, and her hands shook so that she had to rest her elbows on the table. After a few minutes she clicked the hook sharply up and down, and Harry's voice answered again. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Douglas, but I have orders that you are to have no outside calls for a while."

"Listen," she said, "I am just calling my home. I just want to know if they are all right. I just want to speak to them for a minute. I'm not going to tell them anything. Why, I wasn't even going to ask them to come get me."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Douglas," he repeated. And the telephone went dead.

She had flown into a rage and torn the telephone from the wall. With incredible speed she had rushed past Miss

Davis and down the stairs and out the front door to the driveway. She was almost at the gates when they caught up with her.

The next day her phone had been connected again, and Dr. Scott had explained how things were. Her husband, he said, would call her once a week. Pete, it seemed, had agreed with them that it was better that way.

At first her talks with Pete had been stormy, but as the weeks went by they became calmer, until now it was almost as though she and Pete had nothing to say to one another.

"Oh, hello there, Pete."

"Hello, there, Marion. How's every little thing?"

"Fine. How are you?"

"I'm swell."

"How are the boys?"

"Young Pete's playing tennis and Larry's caddying at the club. They said they were going to write you tonight."

"How's Jeanie?"

"She's fine. She's out somewhere. Say, I sent you some magazines and stuff."

"Oh, that's good. The library here isn't—well, *you* know."

"I can imagine. Anything else you want?"

"Well, I was thinking I might like my bed jacket. It's hanging in my closet, to the far right."

"O.K. Anything else?"

"Nothing I can think of now. If there is, I'll let you know."

"Well, be good to yourself."

"You take care of *yourself*. And give my love to the children."

"Sure thing."

"Good-bye, Pete, darling."

"Good-bye."

As she crossed the lawn to the house, she noticed that there were a few people sitting in the canvas chairs in the sun. And seeing Mrs. Tennant coming out of one of the cottages, she called to her. "How about some bridge later?"

"Splendid!" Mrs. Tennant called back. "We were looking for a fourth. I have a grand partner for you. You haven't met her. She used to be a bridge teacher."

Mrs. Douglas went into the house. "I put your mail and a big package that came for you in your room," Harry said.

"Good! I wonder what it is."

She hurried through the living room and up the stairs. Miss Davis was not in the hall. She opened the door to her room and shut it behind her. On her bed was a huge package, with some letters and magazines lying beside it. Going to her dressing table, she picked up her manicure scissors and cut the strings. The package had been carefully wrapped, and it was some minutes before she could get it open. It was a portable victrola and enclosed with it was a record and a note from Pete. "Dear Marion," she read, "This is the only record I could think of that I was sure you would like. When you get tired of it, make a list of what you want and I'll mail more on to you. Love. Pete."

She set the victrola on the table by her bed and, stooping down, disconnected her lamp and plugged the victrola in. She took a needle from the box, screwed it in, and turned on the switch. The record was not labelled, and she waited with a pleasant sense of anticipation for the tubes to warm up. She swung the arm of the victrola to the edge of the

record. Pete's voice, loud and clear, filled the room. "This is the Douglas Studio broadcasting. We are a small company, and if we make a few mistakes, the audience will kindly overlook them."

There was a pause, and Marion Douglas could hear faint laughter and the sound of scuffling. Someone whispered, "Closer, Jeanie, closer." And then Jeanie's voice came, uneven and trembling.

"Hello, Mummie," she said. "This is Jeanie speaking to you. We are having a nice time, but we miss you and hope you are lots better. Come home soon, Mummie. Come home soon."

Marion Douglas snatched the wire from the socket and threw herself across the bed. For a minute she lay quiet with her hands to her ears, and then she began to cry. "Oh, my God," she sobbed, "I've got to get out of here! Oh, my God, I've got to get out of here!"

Her voice rose, and the door of her room opened. "Mrs. Douglas! Mrs. Douglas!" Miss Davis said.

"Get away from me. Get the hell away from me!"

She reached for her pillow and threw it at Miss Davis. And as she did so, she could hear feet running up the stairs. For some reason the sound frightened her and she clutched her hands tightly over her mouth so that whoever was coming would not catch her screaming.

Spirit of Christmas

MARGARET CUMMINGS lifted the large copper bowl, filled with unopened Christmas cards, from the living-room table and carried it over to a bridge table that stood in front of the couch. "Now, then," she said, setting the bowl down.

Mr. Cummings, who was sitting on the couch, put aside a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* and sighed. "Are you going to check them with your list?" he asked.

"Certainly I'm going to check them with my list. I always do. At least, you can check them as I read them to you. There's no sense in keeping people on your list when they don't remember you. And if we find *we've* forgotten someone, we can still get a card in the mail tonight. The list is on my desk."

Mr. Cummings got up and went over to the desk. He was a small, slender man who was untouched by the gaiety of the season. And although, after dinner, he had helped his wife trim their tree, he had done so with a sort of mathematical precision, interested only in the technical details of the business. He had fastened the tree firmly in its stand, tested the lights, straightened the wires on the ornaments, and unwound the tinsel. The twenty Christmases he had lived through since his marriage had left him

with a mild distaste for red and green ribbons, tissue paper, Christmas seals, and the smell of spruce trees.

"It's under the blotter," Mrs. Cummings said. She pulled a straight chair up to the bridge table and sat down. "You might bring that letter-opener, too."

Mr. Cummings brought the letter-opener and the list and sank back on the couch again. "All set?"

"This looks like an ad," Mrs. Cummings said, holding up a square white envelope. She slit it open and her face fell. "It's from Chris. Chris Panagakos. Why, I feel *terribly* about it. I haven't bought a thing there for months, not since I decided to pay cash and go to the A. & P." She ran her finger lightly over the card. "It's engraved, too. And in very good taste. Really, in *very* good taste. It just says 'Compliments of the Season' and 'Panagakos Brothers.' "

"Well," Mr. Cummings said, fingering the list, "do you want to send them a card or don't you?"

"Of course not. I'll just stop in and buy some little thing. Here's one from the Archer girls. You know, Bobby Archer's sisters. I suppose that's intended to be Mattie Archer carrying that boar's head. Any of the Archers would drop dead on a mouthful of boar's head with *their* stomachs. Mattie Archer is ridden with ulcers. Ridden with them."

"O.K.," Mr. Cummings said. "They check."

"Goodness!" Mrs. Cummings exclaimed. "This one's written all over, like a letter. It says, 'Angus is in high school and Barbara is continuing her studies at St. Mary's. We all hope to go East next summer.' Why, it's from this girl I went to college with. This girl was a girl—I hate to say this, but—well, she was crazy. Not exactly crazy, but *odd*. And why she would ever think I would give a hoot about what

her children are doing I'm sure I *can't* say. Helen Smosely was her name. Did you ever hear of anything like it? And it's a good thing she signed it 'Helen Smosely Martin,' because if she'd signed it 'Helen Martin,' I wouldn't have known who she was from a hole in the ground. Put her down for next year, Bill, because she's in Detroit and if I send her a card tonight, she'll know I just did it because I got one from her."

Mr. Cummings took the card and copied the name and address from it carefully.

"I can't get over it," Mrs. Cummings said. "Helen Smosely. She probably got my address from the *Alumni Quarterly*. Here's a card from those friends of yours in New Mexico—the Ryans. I sent them one on your account. Look, their card has a swastika on it. Not very appropriate, considering. You'd think they'd realize how people might feel about swastikas, although I suppose, living in New Mexico, they still think of them in the old way." She shook her head. "Helen Smosely. Here's one from the Burchells. It ends, 'There is laughter everywhere, And the shouts of little children fill the wintry air.' Although I don't see how they would know when they haven't any little children and never did have. I don't believe people can read the verses on the cards they buy or they'd never buy them. I thought ours looked nice this year, didn't you, Bill?"

Mr. Cummings put one hand to his forehead and frowned. "Let's see—"

"Oh, Bill!" Margaret Cummings laughed. "You've forgotten. If that isn't *too* funny! Wait until I tell Frannie. You just about slay her anyway. It was the photograph of

our fireplace that we took last Christmas. Remember how pretty the fireplace looked last Christmas? And I must say I think it was smart of me to have it photographed and plan so far ahead."

"Oh, sure."

"Well, I never told you, but after the cards were all done I had a better idea. Next year, I think it would be cute to have my stocking and your sock hanging from the fireplace and to have my head coming out of my stocking and your head coming out of your sock." She put her head to one side and looked at him speculatively.

"Might be hard to do," he said.

"Nonsense! They do all sorts of things nowadays with photography."

"You'd better step on it," he said. "It's getting late."

"I'm going to plan on it for next year." She fumbled in the bowl and opened another envelope. "Here's one addressed to you. Signed 'Frances Swett.' "

"Swett?" Mr. Cummings repeated. "Never heard of him."

"Never heard of *her,*" Mrs. Cummings corrected. "It's spelled with an 'e.' "

"Well, never heard of her, then."

"It's a nice little card," Mrs. Cummings said sweetly. "A five-cent card, but very neat and in good taste. Just a holly wreath, and it says, 'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.' The signature is in a woman's handwriting."

"Let's see it." Mr. Cummings held out his hand.

"You must have heard of her," Mrs. Cummings insisted, and handed him the card. "There it is. S-w-e-t-t. Could it be somebody in your office?"

"Nope," he answered. "There's nobody in our office named Swett."

"Someone who *was* in your office, then?"

"If she was, I don't remember her."

"Well, she remembered *you*," Mrs. Cummings said. "Not that it matters. We'd better hurry."

She began to open the envelopes, calling off the names to Mr. Cummings, who checked them with the list. Soon the table was covered with cards and the bowl was empty.

"All through?" Mr. Cummings asked.

"Yes, that was the last," she said. She got up and, going over to the tree, switched on the lights. "That is, everybody is accounted for except for the girl who sent you that little card." She reached up and began draping the tinsel more loosely on the branches.

Mr. Cummings watched her as she stood with her back to him. Even in the soft-colored light from the tree he could see that her hair was very gray. And, although her dress was a becoming color, it pulled slightly across her hips and shoulders. Underneath the tree lay the packages that she had arranged so they would give the best effect. She was really very young, he thought. He looked through the cards on the table until he found the one addressed to himself. He opened it and looked at the name Frances Swett. Suddenly he had a vague and pleasant recollection of a girl who had come to his office with a letter of introduction. He remembered that he had been helpful and almost courtly. He tore the card in half and, getting up, he walked to the fireplace and threw the pieces in.

"Probably a mistake of some kind," he said. "Must be more than one William Cummings in the telephone book."

He went over to Margaret and put his arm carelessly around her shoulders. She stopped arranging the tinsel and turned her head toward him so that she could look into his eyes.

He kissed her lightly on the cheek and looked up at the tree. "Smells good," he said.

Between Madison and Park

ONE morning, when Mrs. Gibson awoke, she realized that she didn't feel very well. She had a choking sensation in her throat and couldn't seem to catch her breath. She took a warm bath and a cold shower and went into the dining room, where she sat down at the table and stared at her grapefruit. Mr. Gibson had almost finished his bacon and eggs before she spoke to him. "Ted," she said, "I feel funny."

He looked up from his paper. "How do you mean, funny?" he asked.

"I can't explain it," she said. "I have a choking sensation. You know, as though I were being strangled."

"You're probably coming down with something," he said. "Better take an aspirin."

She pushed her chair back from the table and stood up. "I believe I will," she said. "I certainly don't want any breakfast."

She took two aspirins and began to get dressed. Before she put on her dress she felt so bad that she decided to lie down for a few minutes. She was still lying down when Mr. Gibson came into the bedroom to say good-bye before he left for his office. "Better?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I really think I feel worse with my head down."

"Does your back ache?" he asked.

"No," she said. "It doesn't ache at all. My head doesn't ache, either, and I'm pretty sure I'm not running a temperature. I just feel funny."

"Well, if you don't ache anywhere, you can't have the flu," he said. He stooped to kiss her. "I'll call you up this afternoon. Take care of yourself."

When her husband had gone, Mrs. Gibson reached for the telephone, which stood on the table between the twin beds, and dialled Marion Tyler's number. "Hello, Marion," she said. "How are you?"

"I'm exhausted," Mrs. Tyler said. "I'm thinking about putting up the living-room curtains. You know what a job that is! All those little rings, and getting the cord just right so that they'll pull without getting snarled. Besides, I think that man shrank them. The lining shows below the chintz. I'm worn out thinking about struggling with them. Why don't you come over for lunch?"

"I don't think I'd better," Mrs. Gibson said. "I feel awfully funny. I have sort of a choking sensation and can't get my breath. I think maybe I'll call up Dr. Hammond."

Mrs. Tyler's voice sounded cheerful. "A choking sensation?" she repeated.

"As though I were being strangled," Mrs. Gibson said.

"Well, I wouldn't bother going to see Dr. Hammond about that. I don't think he'll know a thing about it. It certainly sounds to me as though it were just plain nerves, and Hammond doesn't know anything about nerves. If you'll take my advice, you'll go to see Mitchell."

Mrs. Gibson turned on her side and propped her head up

with another pillow. "Mitchell?" she asked. "What does he do?"

"What does he *do?*" Marion Tyler said. "What *doesn't* he do? I'm surprised you've never heard of him. He's a neurologist, and he knows all about psychiatry, too. He's the one who did so much for Peggy Crandall. Remember how jittery she used to be, and remember the day we were playing at my house and she simply threw her hand down on the table and said she couldn't play another minute?"

"I remember, all right," Mrs. Gibson said. "She was minus seventy-six. And over five dollars of it was mine."

"I'd forgotten about that," Marion Tyler said. "The main point is that Mitchell's the man who got her back on her feet. I really think you'd better call him. His office is in the Eighties, between Madison and Park. Anyway, you can find it in the telephone book. John Lorimer Mitchell."

At that moment, Mrs. Gibson's choking sensation became so bad that she drew in her breath sharply. It frightened her, and her voice grew nervous and strained. "I'll have to hang up," she said. "But I'll call him right away. I'll tell him Peggy Crandall recommended him. That'll be best, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do," Mrs. Tyler said. "He's terribly busy, but if he knows Peggy sent you and that it's really urgent, he'll probably see you today. Let me know what happens."

When they had said their good-byes, Mrs. Gibson reached for the telephone book and then dialled Dr. Mitchell's office. The nurse who answered made an appointment for her to see Dr. Mitchell at eleven-thirty that morning.

Mrs. Gibson took a taxi to the Doctor's office, which was

on the main floor of an apartment building on East Eighty-third Street, between Madison and Park. The building was red brick with white trim, which gave it a rather homey appearance until one looked up and saw that it was at least twelve stories high. Dr. Mitchell's office was to the right of the entrance. She rang the bell and stood tapping her foot as she waited. The young woman who answered the door was not in uniform. She wore a neat navy-blue dress with white collar and cuffs, and she had the pleasant, tolerant smile of a kindergarten teacher.

"Mrs. Gibson?" she asked. "This way. Dr. Mitchell will be ready for you in a few moments." She waved her hand toward a room at her right and disappeared into her own small office.

Mrs. Gibson went into the waiting room and sat down in an easy chair which was covered with chartreuse-colored leather. The room was sunny. There was a white iron wall bracket between the windows that held three pots of healthy-looking ivy, and pots of sansevieria stood on either end of the mantel shelf. There was a large table covered with magazines: *Harper's Bazaar, Time, Fortune, Reader's Digest, Vogue,* and the *Saturday Evening Post.* The walls of the room were painted a soft green. Mrs. Gibson looked with interest at the pictures. In a spot where the light was just right for it hung a painting that she thought might be a Matisse. There were also several nice etchings and a woodcut. The floor was covered with a fine Oriental rug. As she looked about her, Mrs. Gibson's choking sensation seemed less unpleasant. She felt that help was at hand and, judging by the appearance of the room, intelligent help.

She thought of Dr. Hammond's office, with its worn black leather chairs, the ancient magazines, and the small sign that requested his patients to refrain from smoking.

After a while the door across the small foyer opened and a woman came out. "Next Tuesday then!" she called back cheerfully.

When the nurse appeared at the doorway of her office and nodded pleasantly, Mrs. Gibson understood that it was her turn. Her knees shook a little as she entered Dr. Mitchell's office. The office was not as sunny as the waiting room, but it looked out into a courtyard planted with flowering shrubs and small evergreen trees. Dr. Mitchell was seated behind a kneehole desk that had a top covered with red leather. He reminded Mrs. Gibson of someone she had seen before. His forehead was high and broad, with a receding hairline which accentuated it. His eyes were blue and sharp, with thick lids that moved slowly when he blinked. He wore a beautifully tailored tweed suit, a soft-blue hand-woven tie, and a blue cornflower in the buttonhole of his coat. He sat with his back to the window, so when Mrs. Gibson sat down facing him, the light shone full on her face.

He got up from his chair as she approached and shook hands with her warmly. Then he sat down again, leaned back in his chair, and clasped his hands together. His hands were brown and his nails were healthy and well polished. "So you're a friend of Mrs. Crandall," he said. He frowned at some memory and then his face cleared again. It was as though, in that brief moment, some disaster had loomed before his eyes and had somehow magically been averted.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Gibson said. "I've known her for years."

"Charming person," he said. "And doing beautifully now, I hear."

"Yes," Mrs. Gibson said. She began to open and shut the zipper on her handbag. "Well, Dr. Mitchell, first I want you to understand that I am not a woman who thinks she has something the matter with her when she hasn't and keeps running to doctors all the time."

He laughed pleasantly. "You don't have to tell me that," he said. "I can see that you're not."

"You'll just have to take my word for it that I'm not," Mrs. Gibson said. "It's just that—well, when I woke up this morning I felt funny. I felt as though I were choking. I mean I don't feel *sick* at all. I just have this choking sensation."

Dr. Mitchell closed his eyes.

Mrs. Gibson saw that there was a bust of Shakespeare in the center of the bookshelves that ran across the side of the room to the right of the Doctor's desk. "Oh!" she cried. "Isn't that the funniest thing! You know, when I came in I was almost sure I'd seen you before, and I guess I was simply thinking of Shakespeare. I mean you would look almost exactly like Shakespeare if you wore a beard."

He opened his eyes. "Now, that's very odd," he said. "So many of my patients have told me the same thing. Personally, I don't see the resemblance. But I suppose one never does see one's own self." He leaned forward and looked at her steadily. "About this choking sensation which you have . . ."

Mrs. Gibson laughed nervously. "I suppose I *imagine* it, really."

"But aren't the things we imagine real to us?" Dr. Mitchell asked softly.

"I daresay they are," Mrs. Gibson said. "At least, I see what you mean. If I thought I were Napoleon, I would really think I *was* Napoleon."

"Let's hope it won't be as bad as that, dear lady," Dr. Mitchell said. He closed his eyes again. "Now, tell me, has anything been worrying you lately?"

Mrs. Gibson thought a minute. "I can't say that it has," she said. "Of course, there's the war, and lately I've noticed that I can't stand riding on the Madison Avenue buses. I didn't used to mind them at all, but really, I've been going out of my way to avoid riding on them."

"I see," he said. "And Mr. Gibson? Now, I don't expect you to tell me your private affairs. You are obviously an adult person and conduct your affairs in an adult manner, but you and Mr. Gibson—"

"Oh, Ted," Mrs. Gibson said. "He's fine."

"Money?" Dr. Mitchell asked.

"Not any more than usual."

"Have you any children?"

"No," Mrs. Gibson said. "I haven't." She added sociably, "Have you?"

"Yes, two," Dr. Mitchell said. "One twelve and the other sixteen. The younger boy is fine. Just a fine, healthy, happy-go-lucky youngster. A real boy. But Lorimer . . ."

"Yes?"

"I can't explain it," Dr. Mitchell said. "Lorimer seems to set the wrong values on the wrong things. We had to change his school again this year, and the other day we got word that he won't graduate with his class."

"Oh," Mrs. Gibson said. "That's a shame. He's probably too mischievous and doesn't like to study. I have a nephew who is like that. Simply won't study."

"Lorimer likes to study," Dr. Mitchell said. "But he only studies what he wants to study. He wants to be a writer. Now, if anyone can understand that feeling, I certainly am that one. I wanted to be a writer myself when I was a boy. But that didn't mean that I neglected my other studies. I feel that Lorimer can be a writer and still follow that pattern of life, the pattern we must follow if we are to live in peace with our fellow-men. I explained it to him when he went away last fall, but he doesn't seem to have understood me."

"Of course, he's only sixteen," Mrs. Gibson said.

"Old enough, though," Dr. Mitchell said sternly, "to realize that he is a human being in a world of human beings. Frankly, Mrs. Mitchell and I don't know what to do with him."

"Does he get into trouble?" Mrs. Gibson asked. "I mean serious trouble."

"Oh, no. Nothing of that sort. He just doesn't like people. He wants to be away by himself. He's either up in the clouds or down in the dumps."

"Maybe if you didn't send him to school and let him go to work for a while," Mrs. Gibson suggested.

Dr. Mitchell breathed in deeply. "I hadn't thought of that," he said. "I'll talk it over with Mrs. Mitchell." He closed his eyes and nodded. "That might be the solution," he said. He opened his eyes and smiled at Mrs. Gibson and she smiled back. "Now, that choking sensation," he said. He took out a prescription blank from the drawer of his

desk, wrote hurriedly on it, and handed it to her. The prescription was written in Latin, but at the bottom of the blank were two words in English. "For tension," they read.

"Thank you," Mrs. Gibson said. She arose to go and they shook hands. "I hope your boy will be all right. I'm *sure* he will. After all, you must realize he's only sixteen."

"I'd like to see you again in about a week," Dr. Mitchell said. "And we'll see if that choking sensation hasn't cleared up. It may be a form of claustrophobia, or it may be that you are overtired and your nerves are playing tricks. Will you stop and make an appointment with Miss Devers, my nurse?"

"Yes, I will," Mrs. Gibson said. "Good-bye."

In the small office next to the waiting room she found Miss Devers. Mrs. Gibson left her name and address and made an appointment to see Dr. Mitchell again a week from Wednesday. "Would you mind telling me what Dr. Mitchell charges?" Mrs. Gibson asked. "My husband will want to know. You know how men are."

"Of course," Miss Devers answered brightly. "Twenty-five dollars for the first visit and fifteen dollars for all other visits, unless you wish him to come to your home. That would be slightly more."

"I see," Mrs. Gibson said. She tucked the prescription in her bag and nodded good-bye to Miss Devers.

The weather was clear and the sky was very blue. Mrs. Gibson remembered that she had had no breakfast and realized that she was hungry. She frowned, thinking of Dr. Mitchell's boy Lorimer. She was fond of children, and as she started toward Madison Avenue she wondered if Dr. Mitchell was handling the boy in the right manner. She

thought that maybe if she could have a little talk with Lorimer sometime, she might understand him better than his parents did. She decided to ride down to Marion Tyler's and have lunch with her after all. She could leave her prescription at the drugstore and pick up her medicine on her way home. She ran across Madison Avenue, hailed a bus, and got on it without thinking about it at all.

Act 1, Scene 2

THE whole effect was theatrical: the half-empty glasses on the table, the opened bottle of champagne wrapped in a white napkin and set in a bucket of melting ice, the soft glow of the lamps, and Dave in a dressing gown of dull-green silk, leaning against the mantelpiece, looking as though he'd speak if someone would only give him the right cue. It was hard to believe that the champagne had not been ginger ale or that when they had gone in the other room together they had not stepped off into the wings, hurrying to their dressing rooms to change their costumes for the next scene.

She had never been in a room like this one, and it seemed incredible to her that a man could live here. It was exactly right for such situations as this, but it was impossible to imagine what it would be like before breakfast or in that enervating half-hour before lunch. She felt that once she closed the door behind her, stage hands would come and roll the scenery about, that the room would disappear and another, homier one take its place. Something called "Mrs. Crumbie's flat. The following morning."

It had looked exciting and strange when she had first come, but now, as she stood at the door ready to leave, it seemed artificial and she was anxious for the curtain to fall. She wondered if it would ever become familiar enough so

that she could lie back with her feet on the couch and scatter sections of a newspaper on the floor or leave papers of matches on the mirrored surface of the low, round table. She became curious about Dave, about what he did when he was alone, where he sat in those moments when he wanted to go quietly to pieces by himself. As far as she could see, there was not one comfortably disordered corner in which to sit and fall apart for a while.

It was a room entirely for the present, and it was as though, once it had been completed, Dave had been carried in, new and shiny, dressed in impeccable evening clothes, with a whole wardrobe for any occasion packed in a trunk like a set of doll's clothes. There was not a personal thing in the room, not a flower, not even a litter of magazines. On the table with the mirror top, a bowl of white porcelain tulips sat, their stems firm in porcelain moss, and over the mantel hung an oil painting of some white peonies against a background of jade green.

Yet she was glad she had come. Being with Dave, coming to his apartment, had given her the same sensation as acting in a play in which she was the leading lady and he was her leading man. A play so cleverly written by some sophisticated Englishman that it fooled the audience every night into believing that the elegant, satisfying little love scenes were real. It was a pity that there had to be more to it than sitting on the couch, sipping champagne, saying scintillating and cryptic things. But in this atmosphere she found it easy to ignore the rest and to think of herself as a rather mysterious figure who appeared from nowhere in particular to stay, gracious and witty, for a few hours before vanishing in the night, leaving behind some sort of subtle fragrance.

She was grateful for the cool, impersonal room and the nebulous quality that Dave had for her. By closing the door, she could shut them out of her mind, one as impartially as the other. She was so convinced that this particular scene had ended and the curtain was about to fall that it was something of a shock when Dave spoke to her.

"Sure you don't want me to take you home?" he asked.

Her voice was irritable. "No," she said hastily. "No." Then, realizing that she had stepped out of the character she had created for herself, she added, "I thought I would like to walk. And think."

"Well, don't think too much," he told her. But he smiled, and she knew it pleased him to imagine her walking home through the night, thinking about him.

She was filled with a terrible impatience to get away. She thought of the book she had started the night before, and the way her bed looked with the little table next to it and the lamp with the blue-and-white dotted-swiss shade. She wanted to open the door and go out without another word, but a sense for the fitness of the situation prevented her doing this. When Dave walked toward her, she forced herself back into her rôle of leading lady.

"When am I going to see you again?" he asked. She was surprised to notice that he seemed a little anxious. His anxiety was out of place with the sophisticated mood she had set, and she was not pleased at the thought of his waiting for her, wondering when it would be all right to call her. She hoped he would not begin to have a heavy touch.

"Oh, soon," she answered vaguely, and turned toward the door.

"How soon?" he persisted. "Tomorrow? The day after? When?"

"I can't think now," she told him.

"I'll call you tomorrow," he said.

"Tomorrow?" she repeated. "I'm not sure where I'll be. I may have to go out early."

"Suppose I call you around noon," he said. "And if you're not there, I'll try later."

"All right," she answered. "All right."

She looked once more around the room, at the low couch with its delicate end tables, at the cool, pure stripes of the window draperies, at the incredible unreality of everything.

"Good-bye," she said, and held out her hand.

He leaned toward her as though he were going to kiss her, but she opened the door quickly and made him take her hand instead. "Good-bye, darling," she said.

Outside, she stood for a moment at the entrance of the apartment house and looked across at the Park and up at the sky. The air was clear and cool. She started walking briskly down the Avenue to her home ten blocks away, smiling when she thought of the evening, deciding that except for the moment at the end, when Dave had been a little too clinging, it had been almost perfect. Yet it amused her faintly to think that it was Dave who was anxious. Men were always going on about how such things should be. They were always complaining that women did not take romances as lightly or as sensibly as men. Pleasant interludes were all they were; brief moments of no consequence.

She felt independent and entirely free as she hurried along. She shook off the spell of the episode and became herself again. A breeze had sprung up and her short black

veil blew against her face and her skirts whipped about her legs. She unbuttoned her coat and took off her gloves as a gesture of relief from the strain of looking exquisite and desirable for so many hours.

It was late and the sound of her heels on the pavement was so loud that she was aware immediately when other footsteps joined hers. They were heavy, urgent footsteps, but as they drew nearer they slowed down until their pace matched hers.

She began to walk more quickly and then, realizing that the man behind her was still keeping pace, she came almost to a standstill, to allow him to pass if he would. He was walking a step or two behind her, and from the corner of her eye she could see his legs in dark trousers and his black, shiny shoes. Quickening her steps again, she counted the blocks to her home, seven of them. In the quiet of the streets she could hear him breathing, and for two blocks they walked in silence. The sound of his footsteps was like the pursuit in a dreadful nightmare. Then he began to speak to her, his voice only a breath that mingled with the wind in her ears. Although she could barely distinguish his words, what he asked was clear enough.

She tried to gather her courage to turn and denounce him, but the things he whispered were so shocking that she felt she would die if she had to look at his face. It was impossible to pretend not to notice his low, insistent tones. There was a question in them that called for an answer.

A woman and a man approached them from the opposite direction, walking arm in arm. They were laughing and animated. She watched them draw near with a sense of relief and thought of running to them, saying "Help me.

This man is following me. He's annoying me." But even as she thought this, the idea of appealing to strangers was abhorrent to her. She remembered the things people said under such circumstances. Things like "If a man tries to pick up a woman, rest assured she's done something to make him think he can." These people might look at her strangely and the man who stayed so close to her might even laugh and swear the lady must be mistaken. Then she would be the slightly comic character of the woman who fancies the worst. He drew nearer, and when the couple passed, he was almost walking at her side. She kept her face rigidly ahead and he dropped back once more, talking incessantly, saying the same things over and over, as though he found a vicious pleasure in them. She reasoned with herself that he couldn't hurt her, that she was safe and would soon be home, but she walked faster and faster until her progress became a flight. As in a dream, she felt that once she could reach the corner and turn into her own street, he would vanish. She was out of breath and her legs ached, but she did not slacken her pace.

As she reached the corner, she turned, and in a moment of sickening terror she began to run. He did not follow her. Above the pounding of her feet on the sidewalk, she could hear him laughing. His laughter was soft and penetrating and malicious.

She was trembling so that it was some time before she could open the door to her own apartment. In the dark she smelled its sweet, familiar scent of perfume, clothes, and cleanliness. She groped for the light and turned it on, and then sank down, spent and exhausted, on the couch. But she found it impossible to sit still, and as though to reassure herself that she was really home again, she began to move

about uneasily, like a cat who has come to a strange place. She stood in front of the bookshelves and read the titles of the books, she laid her hand gently on the piano and fingered small ornaments on the table. She went from lamp to lamp, turning each on until everything in the room was bright and clear.

In her bedroom she turned back the spread on her bed, folding it carefully, arranging the pillows with precision. She took off her hat, her coat, and then her dress, because they reminded her too sharply of her rout. She avoided the mirror over her bureau, as though to look at a face, any face, even her own, was too much to stand. Carefully she went through the routine of getting ready for bed, but as she went about the room, her terror clung to her and she could not shake it off.

At last she sat down on the edge of her bed and, reaching for the telephone, dialled Dave's number. It was some time before he answered, and his voice sounded sleepy and pleased. "Darling," he said. "What's the matter?"

She could not bring herself to tell him. "I was just feeling lonesome," she explained. "And I wanted to tell you that I got home safe and sound."

"I wish you were here," he told her.

"I wish I were, too," she said. "Talk to me a little."

She tried to picture his room as it had looked when she left it, and she held the phone tightly, concentrating on his cool, matter-of-fact voice, shutting everything out but the stage on which she had played so short a time ago. She sat without stirring, like an animal paralyzed with fright, hoping that Dave would go on talking and talking, afraid to make the slightest move lest her own familiar room fall to pieces under her feet.

But Seriously

NATALIE FISHER waited a week after Howie Prentice went back to college before she wrote him. She decided to put off writing until the country-club tennis matches were over, so that she would have something to write him about. Howie was crazy for tennis and he had felt terribly because he had to be in New Haven for two weeks, tutoring, before college started.

Natalie knew exactly the sort of letter she would write Howie: a friendly, straight-from-the-shoulder letter, all about the tennis and, maybe, a little something about herself. She would make it clear that she was not the silly kind of girl who was so boy-crazy that she went around writing to young men before they wrote to her.

She went to the finals with her best friend, Evelyn Gates. It was a hot September day, and she and Evelyn sat under the big maple tree at the side of the court and drank four Coca-Colas each. It was fun watching the matches, especially when Natalie thought of writing to Howie about them. She remembered how he had looked when he played last year and how he lost his temper. After the last set she and Evelyn walked down the driveway of the club to the main road and turned toward Natalie's house. "I think," Natalie said, "I'll drop Howie a line and tell him how the

matches came out. The poor kid! He was so burned up about having to go away."

"Was he?" Evelyn asked.

"Oh, *awfully*," Natalie said. "*I* think he would have won, too."

"He didn't last year."

"He was the youngest one who played last year," Natalie said. Her voice was reproachful. "And he's improved loads since then. He's *really* good now."

Evelyn pulled a leaf from the privet hedge that grew in front of the Fishers' house and made small punctures in it with her fingernail. "He thinks he is," she said.

"I don't see what you've got against Howie," Natalie said.

Evelyn let her eyelids fall until her eyes were almost closed. "*Against* him?" she asked. "I haven't got anything *against* him. I just don't think about him one way or another. Not that he has anything particularly in his favor that I can see. He never goes to the dances and he never takes anybody anywhere."

"He doesn't like girls," Natalie said. "That is, he doesn't like most girls. I think they just bore him."

"Well, *he* bores me." Evelyn threw the leaf away.

"The trouble with you is you never like any boy that doesn't fall for you," Natalie said.

Evelyn smiled and smoothed her dress over her hips. "Why should I?" she asked. "Why should I? Well, look, I'm going along home and get dressed. And I'll stop by for you later, about half past seven, and we can make the first show."

"O.K.," Natalie said. "See you later."

In the house, Natalie went upstairs to her room and sat

down at her maple kneehole desk. She took out her notepaper, which was pale blue with a darker blue stripe around the edges, and had her name printed in neat block letters at the top. Her handwriting was round and compact.

"Dear Howie," she wrote. "Just a scrawl to say hiyah and did you have a good trip to New Haven. Everybody here keeps asking me how you are, and Ken tells me that he is going to see you sometime this winter if you ever get to the 'wicked city.' He is going to be interning at Lenox Hill Hospital this winter. Come to think of it, he has probably imparted all this to you, but repetition makes perfect, to coin a phrase.

"But to get to the tennis, which, as you've probably guessed, is why I'm writing you. The tournament is over at the club. I was there every day. Wild horses couldn't have kept me away, and I dragged Evelyn along for 'company.' Naturally, people 'wish you were here.' Really, I have never seen such lousy tennis. Nobody, even your pal Ken, who is awfully nice, has the vaguest idea beyond socking the ball each time to hell and gone. Surprisingly, Bob Hubbard from Manchester, who must be at least thirty, is the only boy who looked good at all. He at least made some pretense at setting up an attack, not whamming the ball for a kill until he was sure he could make it come off, and he can pivot on a dime and pick them off the tapes. When he serves you can hear him grunt for a mile, but, by God, he's fun to watch. The other contestants had another fine technique and I got myself in very bad by remarking on it to the effect that I guessed they had lately developed a new one—to serve as many double faults as possible. I got myself in worse by telling Patty that her

brother looked weak, didn't they feed him enough at home.

"I've been telling all and sundry that you didn't mind too much missing the matches. I really hope you didn't. In our ménage we are working toward a return to civilization and expect to be in New York by the first of October. We will be at the same old place—82 East 90th—in case you never knew.

"Evelyn and I watched the finals today. That is, I watched and Evelyn fooled around the way she does. Let's see, where to begin? Well, come the finals. In the first set, which Bob won, Ken turned his ankle in that god-damn red granite dust with which they have been surfacing the courts. The second set went off without any fireworks, Bob blasting his way through that one, too. Then there was a grand consultation at the net, and then they changed courts for the third set. Ken was limping visibly by this time, but he won the third set in a breeze. He was acting mad too—and I for one didn't blame him for being mad. Mr. Parrish, the referee, was handing him the rawest deal I ever saw—he was calling Ken's shots out and Bob's in when they hit literally the same spot (after they'd changed courts, naturally) and he would wait until Ken had returned the ball before calling faults on service, and when Ken would ask him whether a ball was in or out, Parrish would say I don't know, take two, or play it over. So you can see Mr. Parrish was trying to throw Ken, although a lot of people were crying that Ken hadn't really turned his ankle but was grandstand-playing. Well, the fourth started with everybody pretty tense, and it climbed from 5—2 and Ken limping so he could hardly stand and trying toward the end to throw two games to Bob and end the match. At 10—all, Ken

finally defaulted and it was all over. I don't know all the facts yet, but maybe you can get them out of Ken, and I certainly am from now on on his side.

"Well, this is one of those notes you start and think you'll just dash off and then they take a week to finish. But seriously, I would like to know what you think of all the excitement. The enclosed clipping is from the Manchester *Journal* and should give you all the tennis news until today's match in a nutshell.

"So bye now and have fun. I must dash as I have to eat dinner and go to the movies (first show) with Evelyn!"

When she had finished, she carefully reread what she had written and signed her name. It would be three days at least before she would get an answer, she thought. She carried the letter downstairs and laid it on the hall table.

She had almost finished dinner when Evelyn came into the dining room. She carried the letter in her hand. "I saw this on the hall table," she said "I wrote something on the envelope, just for a joke."

Natalie took the letter from her and saw that Evelyn had written "Hello, Howie. How are you? Love and stuff; Evelyn," on the back in pencil.

"I think you're mean," Natalie said. "He'll hate it. It's downright embarrassing. I don't think I ought to mail it this way."

Evelyn laughed. "Oh, come on, Nat," she said. "What difference does it make?"

Against her better judgment, Natalie dropped the letter into the box at the post office on her way to the movies.

Three days later, Natalie started to the post office to get the mail. There was a chance that Howie had answered the

letter the day he got it. She wondered what he would say, and wondered whether he would suggest seeing her in New York some weekend later in the fall. She remembered that she had written him her New York address. When she got to the post office, Evelyn was coming down the steps. She had a letter in her hand and she waved it at Natalie. "From Howie!" she called.

Natalie's heart gave a quick beat, and then she saw that the letter had been opened. "He's furious with me," Evelyn said happily. "He says he got kidded to death about what I wrote on the envelope. And he says to thank you a lot for the clipping."

Natalie forgot about getting her own mail and turned and walked down the stairs with Evelyn. "I'm going to let him cool off a few days," Evelyn said. "And then I'm going to write and tell him just what I think of him. That ought to burn him up, don't you think?"

"No," Natalie said bleakly, "I don't."

Going Home

HER train left from Pennsylvania Station at ten o'clock. Mrs. Carey had suggested that she wait and take an early-morning train, but Evelyn felt that she didn't want to waste a minute. "Seem's if I can't hardly wait to get goin'," she said.

"But you won't get to Washington until sometime in the middle of the night," Mrs. Carey said.

"Yes, Ma'am," Evelyn agreed. "That train don't get in till around two. And the train for Atlanta don't go for a couple of hours after that."

"Goodness!" Mrs. Carey exclaimed. "You'll have to sit in the station all that time! Well, find a nice, comfortable seat and try and get a little sleep."

The Careys ate an early dinner the night Evelyn left. It was only eight-thirty when she finished the dishes. She untied the minute organdie apron she wore to serve dinner and slipped off her smart black uniform. Her dark-red crêpe dress, freshly pressed, hung over the back of a chair. After she put her uniform away in the broom closet, she stood for a minute in her slip, smoothing her arms with her hands in an ecstasy of anticipation. The palms of her hands looked almost white against the soft dark brown of her arms. She fingered the creamy lace of the slip that Mrs. Carey had given her for a going-away present and straight-

ened the seams of the stockings which covered her slender, pretty legs.

The red crêpe was becoming. She had paid twelve dollars for it, almost a week's pay, and it emphasized the shining whiteness of her teeth and the warm brown of her skin. She opened her suitcase and took out a comb and brush, part of the set that LeRoy had given her for Christmas. The suitcase smelled of lilac, and it was filled with a few clothes, neatly folded, and a dozen or so small packages—gifts for Mary, Auntie, old Mrs. Valentine, and the kids. She brushed her hair back from her face until it shone and combed the ends in crisp curls all over her head. She picked up her pearl button earrings, which lay on the window sill, and screwed them onto the lobes of her ears.

The kitchen window was open. She could see out across the rooftops of the four-story private houses to Central Park and the dark, unruffled water of the reservoir. The lights from the apartment houses on Central Park West were reflected in the water, and the street lamps brought out the pale green of the leaves. She could hear the muffled hum of cars passing endlessly through the Park.

She turned back to the kitchen. It was clean and quiet. The yellow walls were soft in the electric light, and an alarm clock ticked away on top of the white enamel refrigerator. She took a pencil and paper from the table drawer and wrote, "½ pint heavy cream & 1 qt milk," and slipped it into the top of a milk bottle that stood on the drainboard of the sink. Then, closing her bag, she carried it into the hall. Her coat and hat were in the hall closet, and she put them on. Her hat was tiny and was made of white gardenias.

After a last look at herself in the hall mirror, she went to the door of the living room and stood there shyly.

Mr. and Mrs. Carey were listening to the radio, but when Mrs. Carey saw her, she got up quickly and turned the radio down. "Why, Evelyn," she said, "how nice you look!"

"Mrs. Carey," she said, "I *feel* nice."

"Well, Evelyn"—Mr. Carey stood up and felt in his pocket—"here. Get yourself something to eat on the train." He walked over and handed her a five-dollar bill.

"Oh, Mr. Carey!" she said. "Mr. Carey, you didn't need to go and do that."

"Now, that's to spend, Evelyn. To spend on yourself." Mrs. Carey smiled and held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said. "And if you get held up a day or so, just drop me a postal and let us know, so we won't worry about you."

"I wrote out the note for the milkman. But I didn't put out the bottle yet. It don't look very pretty in the hall."

"I'll put it out later," Mrs. Carey told her.

"Good-bye, Mr. Carey," Evelyn said. "I told Nancy to take real good care of you while I'm gone."

"We'll be all right."

She looked down at the floor and giggled. "Nancy ain't bad, but she ain't good, neither."

"That's a fine thing to be telling us at the last minute!" Mr. Carey said jovially.

They followed her to the hall and said final good-byes on a note of hilarity.

Dan, the boy on the service elevator, asked her if she wanted a taxi, and she laughed at this subtle jest. "Now, don't you let any folks go ringing that doorbell until my friend comes in the morning," she said. "Mr. Carey don't

like to answer the doorbell the first thing." She took a key from her bag and handed it to him. "And don't forget to see she gets that. She'll be here at seven sharp."

"Look out she don't get your job away from you," Dan said. "How long you going to be away?"

"A week."

"A lot of things can happen in a week."

Out in the street, Evelyn hurried toward Fifth Avenue. Waiting for the lights to change, she wondered if Nancy would have sense enough to remember about Mrs. Carey's pineapple juice in the morning. Mrs. Carey was reducing and didn't eat a regular breakfast.

She crossed over to the bus stop and stood humming to herself. It was a warm night and the benches along the Park were filled with people. Police dogs and Airedales walked sedately by with their masters, and Scotties and fox terriers pulled and choked on their leashes.

Every seat on the top of the bus was taken, but she found a place by an open window downstairs. She rested her feet on her suitcase and took a dime from her bag. She looked at her neat kid gloves and remembered how she had looked when she first came to New York almost seven years before. She hadn't owned a pair of gloves then and her hands had been rough, with broken, cracked nails. She thought of the Careys' small, pretty apartment and of her own room on 146th Street near Convent Avenue. It was a big room that faced on the street, and in the summer evenings she sat by the window looking out, drinking a bottle of Coca-Cola through a straw. The room was plain, but it was clean and had a washbasin in one corner. She could have her friends up, too, because of the day bed, which

made it look like a living room. There was a worn carpet on the floor, a painted chest of drawers, an upholstered chair, and two straight chairs. And behind a screen there was an electric plate over which she and LeRoy cooked shrimp gumbo every Sunday night.

She had been happy in that room except for a gnawing homesickness that never left her, not even when she sat in the Apollo or the Regent watching the funniest pictures. It was as though she had to think of her sister Mary and of Auntie's house in Atlanta. She tried to tell LeRoy about Auntie's house. It was on the side of the street that had a sidewalk, and it had a porch covered with honeysuckle vines. "It's just a little, old, green house," she told him, "but it's on the good side."

Lately she had talked so much of her folks—Mary, Auntie, old Mrs. Valentine, who boarded with them, and the kids—that LeRoy couldn't stand it. "Lady," he said, "you better get goin'." And he had given her money to help pay for her round-trip ticket. "I ain't big-hearted," he explained. "I just can't stand you no more."

He had wanted to take her to the station, but Mr. Conelly, the gentleman he worked for, had picked tonight to have a dinner party.

At Pennsylvania Station, she bought a movie magazine and got on the train. It was sticky and close, and the lights seemed dim. She swung her bag to the rack overhead, sat down, and opened the magazine. After she had looked at the pictures, she felt thirsty and walked to the end of the car and got a drink from the water-cooler. As she drank it, the train began to move and she had a sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach. She had had the same feeling when

she was about to leave Atlanta, and Auntie had told her she was journey-proud. Going back to her seat, she took her bag down and opened it. There were the two house dresses for Auntie, the quart of Old Grand-Dad for old Mrs. Valentine, the green silk nightgown and clips for Mary, and the socks and toys for the kids. She tried to think how it would be at the station in Atlanta and how Mary would carry on when she walked in on them. LeRoy had thought she'd better write, but she had wanted to surprise them.

She took off her hat of white gardenias and put it in a paper bag she had packed for that purpose. The car was almost empty, and although she was feeling thirsty again, she was too shy to walk to the water-cooler again. "Folks'll think I've swallowed a bag of salt," she thought.

She closed her eyes and thought of Auntie's house and the back yard with the two peach trees that bore hard, bitter fruit. The floors of Auntie's house were bare and splintered, and the furniture was mostly stuff people had given to her, but the rich aroma that came from Auntie's kitchen made you forget such things. With the suitcase open on her knees, she fell asleep.

It was after one when she awakened, her neck stiff and her hands cramped. She set the suitcase on the seat beside her and stood up. Someone farther down the aisle was snoring heavily, and looking out the window, she saw that it had started to rain. Heavy drops fell against the glass, which was misty and streaked. She walked to the water-cooler and pressed the faucet, but the cooler was empty. Her mouth was dry and she was hungry. She went back and took her hat from the bag and put it on, adjusting it by her reflection in the window. She found her chamois and wiped the

dirt from her face and reddened her mouth with lipstick. Then she sat, sleepy and uncomfortable, thinking of the five dollars Mr. Carey had given her and of what she would have to eat in the station in Washington.

The station looked deserted. A few Red Caps stood about and they looked at her as she passed. She checked her bag and started across the station to an all-night drugstore. Two men sat at the counter drinking coffee, and she stood looking up at the menu pasted on the mirror before she sat down. The most expensive thing on the menu was a club sandwhich, which was fifty cents, and she decided to order one and tell Mr. Carey about it when she got back to New York.

She climbed up on a stool. The two men stopped talking and turned to look at her, and the counterman stopped polishing glasses and walked toward her.

"I can't serve you here," he said.

For a minute she looked at him uncomprehending, and then she understood. In an agony of embarrassment, she slid to her feet.

"I can give you something to take out," he said.

"No," she said. "No thank you."

The two men smiled and shook their heads. "Northern nigger," one of them said.

She walked into the waiting room and was about to sit down when she noticed that the few colored people in the station had taken a bench in the back of the room together. She hurried toward them. There were four women and one old man. The women carried cheap imitation-leather valises and bundles wrapped in newspapers. Their hands were bare and their feet bulged and strained in their shoes.

Evelyn was conscious of her hat with the white gardenias and of the bright red of her lipstick. She sat down stiffly near the old man. Her mouth was very dry and her head ached. She leaned toward him. "Could you kindly tell me where I could get something to eat?" she asked.

He took off his hat and she saw that his hair was white and thick. "They's a place six, seven blocks. But I don't know if it's open. You'll get mighty wet. Sure is comin' down."

Her hand went up to the white gardenias. "Thank you just the same," she said.

One of the colored women looked at Evelyn and whispered to her friend. They began to laugh.

She didn't know how long she sat there. Somewhere in the station there was a drink of water to be had, but it was as though she couldn't move to try and find it. She was in Washington and later she would be in Atlanta. Suddenly she stood up and walked rapidly to the checkroom. Handing in her check, she got her suitcase. Her eyes were shining and clear and she held her head high.

She passed a Red Cap and turned quickly and touched him on the arm. "When's the next train leave for New York?" she asked.

He looked toward the station clock. "In about three minutes," he said. "Track eighteen. You goin' North?"

Her laughter was deep and satisfying. "Not me, boy," she said. "I'm goin' home."

He'll Outgrow It

WHEN Mrs. Scott's son, Richard, wrote her that he was going to be married, she spent the morning telephoning to her closest friends. "Richard's going to be married, so he writes," she said, "and he's already rented a small apartment. I suppose that Toledo was just too much for him, living in a hotel and everything. I suppose he's just lonesome and wants a *home*. Although goodness knows how he can plan to have a home, moving about the way he does, six months here and eight months there. . . . No, I've never met her. All I know is that her name is Helen Voorhees and that he must be in love with her, or he wouldn't be marrying her, would he?"

When she had finished telephoning, she sat down at her Governor Winthrop desk and wrote Richard a letter on heavy pale-gray paper. "My dear Richard:" she wrote, "Your news came as a surprise. I am delighted, of course, that you appear to be so happy, and I hope everything will turn out for you as splendidly as you seem to think it will. I hope that 'Helen' (such a pretty name! 'Helen, thy beauty is to me Like those Nicaean barks of yore, That gently, o'er a perfumed sea, The weary, wayworn wanderer bore To his own native shore') understands that you are indeed a 'weary, wayworn wanderer' and that you have told her all about how you have to 'pull up stakes' every few

months, especially now when you may be called goodness knows where on defense work. I am sure you *have* told her, and I am sure she is a very remarkable young woman and understands that a consulting engineer's work makes this necessary. I want you to be *fair* to her. Thank you, my dear boy, for asking me to make the trip to Toledo for the wedding. There is nothing I would like better to do, but I am going to curb my impatience, and who knows but that someday in the distant future you can bring 'Helen' *home.* I feel that I would rather see her for the first time in my own little place, where I am surrounded by the memories of your dear father and your own happy boyhood, and not in Toledo, a city about which I know nothing and where, I am sure, I would feel *most* strange. That is, I think I would, as I gather from your letters that it is indeed a 'jumping-off spot.' Would you like me to send your books on to you? There they sit on their cozy shelves in your bedroom, but I am sure they miss you! And the things in your bureau and in the toy chest. What about them? Would you care for any of your pictures, or would you prefer that they remain on the walls of your bedroom, where they have hung for so long? I am afraid that in moving them spots will show where the wallpaper has faded, but that is a minor detail and deserves no consideration. Write me, my dear son, and I will do as you wish. Now, my fondest love to 'Helen' (my, what a popular name that was with young mothers of thirty years ago!) and tell her that I will write her soon. Affectionately, Mother."

In reply to her letter, Richard wrote that he would let her know about his things later. And Mrs. Scott, with set lips, dusted his books and put them in cartons, ready

for shipping. She stripped the pictures from his walls and packed them in a barrel, together with his framed collection of butterflies, some shells, souvenirs of the summer they had spent at the shore, his school and college trophies, and the stuffed owl he had shot when he was ten. As the owl, its wings spread and its glassy eyes staring, had been his most prized possession, she sprayed it with Larvex, wrapped it in tissue paper, and placed it on the top of the barrel. Then she pushed the barrel and the boxes of books onto the sleeping porch, drew down the shades in Richard's room, and closed his door. Her face was stony. "This is the way he wants it," she thought.

Before Richard had been born, his room had been built expressly for him by adding an L-shaped wing to the ground floor of the house. It was a large, sunny room that faced south, and it had its own bath and a sleeping porch. To be sure, when he was a baby the room had been used solely as a playroom, and Richard had slept in a crib next to his mother's bed upstairs, so that she could hear him if he cried in the night. During this interval, Mr. Scott had been moved to the small, sparsely furnished guest room, where he had remained, without adequate closet space, until the day of his death. When Richard was six and had to be made into a little man, he was transferred downstairs to his own handsome quarters. For a week after the move, Mrs. Scott slept on the couch in the living room, and then, somewhat reassured by the fact that Richard was taking the change beautifully, she uneasily took to her own bed once more. Richard, his mother boasted, was a difficult child. It pleased her to remember that he was eighteen months old before his food stayed on his stomach for any length of time. By his

eleventh birthday, he had run the gamut of children's diseases, knocked a chip off a front tooth, broken his ankle, got hopelessly behind in his arithmetic, and been run over by a Mrs. Forman, who was innocently backing out of the Scotts' driveway after a successful afternoon at bridge. Richard was only bruised, but Mrs. Scott and Mrs. Forman had not spoken for years afterward.

The day of Richard's wedding, his mother sat in the living room of her house in Monroe, Connecticut, and thought about him. The door that led to the screened side porch was open, and although it was almost unbearably hot outdoors, the room was pleasant. A bowl of stock and old-fashioned pinks on the low pine table gave a spicy scent to the air, and the revolving spray made a cool sound as it played on the lawn. The lilac bush by the window drooped in the heat, and a fly buzzed and battered itself against the screen door of the porch. Mrs. Scott sat very still, her small, square hands folded in her lap, her feet, in their neat black oxfords, crossed daintily. In spite of the weather she wore a thin black wool skirt that reached to her ankles, a black silk blouse with a white collar of Irish lace, and a black velvet band around her throat. Her hair was damp from the heat and curled in soft rings at the nape of her neck.

The afternoon dragged on, and as the time of the ceremony drew near she arose, and going to the door that led to Richard's room, she opened it and stood on the threshold. The room looked strange and uninhabited; the mattress on the bed had been folded over and covered with newspapers; the bureau top and the bookshelves were bare; and the blue-and-white wallpaper showed ugly spots where the pictures

had been removed. The air was close and smelled strongly of camphor. For a few minutes she stood looking at the narrow bed, at the boyish severity of the furnishings, the practical gray of the rug, and the square solidity of the toy chest. It was a boy's room, she thought, and nodded her head in satisfaction.

Mrs. Scott was glad she had written Richard, in reply to his suggestion that he and Helen might come East on their honeymoon, that she was sure they would be better off by themselves. It was shocking to think of jars of powder and creams on the bureau, indecent to think of scented feminine things hanging in the closet that had known only the acrid smell of youth. Someday, she thought, someday, if the marriage lasted and if he insisted on bringing Helen home, she would move another bed into the guest room. It was the most she would do.

She closed the door and went back to her chair, where she sat watching the clock. When she was sure the wedding was over, she sighed, and her eyes filled with tears. She went to her desk and began to write. "My dear boy: So you are an old married man now! You will understand, I know, when I say that I cannot believe it. It was warm here today, but pleasantly so, and I felt for you this morning when I read of the 'hot spell' in the Middle West. I hope you weren't hurt by my seeming indifference to your suggested visit here, but to tell you the truth, my dear son, I didn't feel 'up to' the strain of entertaining 'newlyweds' (what a horrid word!). If, however, you could slip off for a few days sometime in the near future by yourself, I would love to see you and hear all your news, which must be very exciting indeed! This morning, Red Curtis passed

the house on his way to play tennis. He is spending his furlough with his mother, and he looked well. He was surprised when I told him you were being married this very day, and he looked such a boy with his nice tan and his mop of red hair that it gave me a shock when I realized that there is only a few months' difference in your age and his. I am sure Mrs. Curtis is delighted to have him home with her once more. I told him I hadn't laid eyes on you for almost two years, but that it wouldn't be long, I hoped, before you were home for a brief visit. Write me, my dear boy, as I am anxious to know how things are working out for you. Affectionately as always, Mother. P.S. My very best to 'Helen,' too, of course!"

The summer drew to a close, and from time to time there were letters from Richard, and even, at first, long and detailed letters from Helen. Mrs. Scott answered Helen's letters conscientiously and briefly within a week after she had received them, but her letters to Richard were warm and bore the small bits of gossip that she thought he would want to hear.

It was the end of September when she received a letter from him that made her almost dizzy with happiness. It was still hot in Toledo, he wrote. They were pretty sick of their small apartment, but as he was about to be shifted around again, there was no sense in looking for another place. He thought it likely that he would be sent on to the plant in Bridgeport, and if it meant a short stay there, he and Helen had been debating whether or not it was worth while for her to make the move with him. Probably it would be better for her to stay with her family. The way it looked now, he would only be a month or so there, and then on to Detroit

for a really decent stay of a year or more. There was the expense of moving, and money didn't grow on trees, and hotels cost such a hell of a lot. And what did she think?

Mrs. Scott answered cautiously. She suggested that if the stay in Bridgeport was such a short one, it might be more practical if he came alone. In that case he could live at home and have his old room, which was perfect for one person but might not be too comfortable for Helen. There was the little car, too, she reminded him, which he was more than welcome to, and he could drive to work in about an hour. "I hesitate," she added, "to interfere in your plans, and if 'Helen' has made up her mind that she would be better off waiting for you in Toledo until you are more settled, I would not like her to change on my account. This is a rather dull little town in the winter, and I suppose, like all young women, she feels happier surrounded by her own friends."

She was not surprised when Richard wired her that he was coming East and coming alone. She flew into a fever of activity. She opened the windows of his room and let in the sharp autumn air. She unpacked his books and arranged them on the shelves: "The Call of the Wild," "Mooswa," "Kidnapped," "Treasure Island," "Les Misérables," "Rob Roy," "The Pirate," the sets of Tennyson, Dickens, and Mark Twain. She brought bound volumes of *Popular Mechanics* down from the attic and arranged them on the lower shelves along with the "Motor Boys" and the "Aviation Boys" series. She polished his silver trophy cups and hung his rifle on the wall where it always used to be, between the picture of the dead moose and the photograph of the senior class at the Monroe Gram-

mar School. She opened the toy chest and rearranged the Meccano sets, the small sailboats, the catcher's mask, and the boxes of games, noticing as she did so that the things looked almost new, as though they had not been played with very long or very hard. It reminded her how Richard had tired of his toys—more quickly than most boys. She brushed the stuffed owl and placed it on Richard's bureau. It was so large that there was scarcely any room left for his military brushes and his comb. She put fresh curtains at the windows and made his bed. When she had finished, she gave a last look around. The room had recaptured its personality and was what it had always been—a boy's room.

Yet, oddly enough, as she waited at the station for him the next day, she was nervous. And when he stepped off the train it was a moment before she recognized him. He looked taller and thinner, and as he kissed her, he seemed impatient and hurried. They drove away from the station in silence, over to the Post Road, under the fading elms. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and saw that his mouth was tired and petulant and that his clothes were almost shabby. When they turned onto the dirt road that led to the house, he smiled and drew a deep breath. The autumn sunlight was a warm gold, and the fields were rich with purple asters and harsh yellow goldenrod. Ahead of them the hills rose, bronze and hazy. "Smells good," Richard said.

"I've always thought this was a particularly pretty little spot," Mrs. Scott answered.

The house was clean and quiet. The kitchen clock and the clock on the mantelpiece in the living room sounded noisy as they entered. Mrs. Scott took Richard by the arm

and pulled him toward his room. "It's just the same," she said. "Just as you left it."

He flung his suitcase on the bed and stood looking around, "Well, I'd better wash up," he said. He opened his bag and took out his razor, shaving brush and soap, hairbrushes and comb. He carried them to the bureau and moved the owl to one side. "Have I time for a bath?"

"Oh, of course," his mother answered. "Of course, dear. Will a half-hour be all right?"

"Sure thing." He took a clean shirt from the bag and laid it on the foot of the bed. Mrs. Scott watched him as he unfastened his tie. When he had loosened the top button of his shirt, he stopped.

"Oh!" his mother exclaimed. "Well, I have a few more things to do before dinner is ready, and I'll leave you to yourself."

When she left the room, he shut the door after her.

Although Mrs. Scott had planned the dinner with loving care, it was not a success. Richard ate the tender slices of roast beef, the late garden peas, the delicious brown biscuits, and the flaky apple pie without comment. His face was sulky, and she racked her brains to think of small, interesting bits of gossip that might make him laugh. He listened to her quietly, occasionally asking questions which showed that he was not sure what she was talking about. "Who's she?" or "I don't remember him. What did you say his name was?"

After dinner he went into the living room and listened to the radio while she washed the dishes. And later they sat listening to the radio together, scarcely speaking, until almost ten. Suddenly he switched it off and looked toward

the clock. "If it's all right with you," he said, "I think I'll turn in."

She followed him to the door of his room. "I think you'll find everything."

"Oh, sure," he said. "Sure."

"I'm afraid I haven't had a chance to ask you about Helen." Her voice was as casual as though she had said she had forgotten to ask how his new bicycle worked.

"She's O.K. I wired her when I got to Bridgeport."

"Well, dear—" She lifted her face, and he kissed her on the cheek and closed the door.

Mrs. Scott pulled her rocking chair close to the fire and sat down. She breathed softly, so that she could hear Richard as he moved about the room. For almost an hour she sat, trying to imagine step by step what he was doing, what things his hands lingered on as they touched. His light still shone under the door, but he was so quiet that she wondered if he might not have fallen asleep.

She got up and opened his door. The first thing she saw was that the owl had been moved from the bureau, and in its place was the picture of a girl. She was not an especially pretty girl, and Mrs. Scott, staring at her, realized that she had nothing to fear.

Richard lay face down on his bed. He had not even undressed. As his mother stood in the doorway, he turned and lifted his head, and she saw that he must have been crying. He looked very young, almost as young as he had been when he cried because she would not let him have a canoe. She had given in finally about the canoe, and before very long he had tired of it and begged for a boat with an outboard motor. She sat down on the bed beside

him. "My!" she said. "If you knew how funny you look in that little bed! If you hadn't rushed me so, the other one would have been here. I was saying to Mr. Norton at the furniture store only this morning that you'd probably outgrown it and that it certainly would not do for *two* people.

"You see," she went on hastily, "I've been rather daring and taken matters into my own hands. I decided it was rather—well, rather selfish of Helen not to be willing to come East with you. Sometimes I don't understand the young women of today."

Richard sat up, and his face was puzzled. "But Helen—" he began.

"I can understand your wanting to make excuses for her," his mother said. "But in my day a wife's place was with her husband. And if you want my opinion, she'd better give up her foolish ideas and come East as fast as she can. *Her* place is with you."

She rose briskly and walked toward the door, Richard's eyes were clear and he looked happy and excited. For some unaccountable reason her mind travelled upstairs to the storeroom, which was full of the other toys that he had begged for and that she had given him. And she smiled when she remembered that they were as good as new.

Hostess Gift

MRS. CHENEY stepped from the elevator at the second floor of the department store and stared blankly around. The walls were covered with gay, flowered wallpaper and the large space was divided into four smaller rooms, which had wide, arched doorways. In each of the rooms was a table crowded with ashtrays, salad bowls, cigarette boxes, powder boxes, pieces of glassware, book ends, and a dozen or more other things. The gold-and-white sign which hung over the first archway read "Gifts."

Mrs. Cheney walked across the heavy, sand-colored carpet to one of the tables and began picking up ashtrays. She did not look at the ashtrays but looked, rather, at the bottoms of them, where the prices were marked. Her eyes were as expressionless as though she had been hit over the head with something heavy. A salesgirl came briskly across the room toward her, and although Mrs. Cheney heard her as she drew near, she did not lift her eyes.

"May I help you?" the salesgirl asked.

Mrs. Cheney sighed. "I suppose so," she said. She picked up a brass-and-enamel dinner bell, jingled it, and sighed again. "They have everything," she said. "And the butler stands right there all the time they're eating, so they couldn't possibly need a bell."

"Ashtrays are always nice," the salesgirl suggested.

Mrs. Cheney lifted her eyes and looked at the young woman wearily. "They have ashtrays," she said. "They have everything, really. Besides, I don't think an ashtray would seem *enough*. I'm staying five days." She touched the brim of her hat, pulling it over her forehead slightly. It was a black felt hat trimmed with a powder-blue velvet flower. It was a hat that went with anything.

"This is amusing, I think," the salesgirl said. She picked up a pottery jug and turned a key. The music box concealed in the bottom of the jug began to play "How Dry I Am."

Mrs. Cheney listened to it. "No," she said. "They're a married couple. I thinks that's meant more for a bachelor."

"It's amusing," the salesgirl said.

"But more for a bachelor." Mrs. Cheney moved away from the table and walked on to the next room, and the salesgirl followed.

"I really shouldn't stay five days," Mrs. Cheney said. "But that's what she wrote. Five days. I thought it odd. I thought a weekend or a whole week. But five days seems odd. When I began the letter, I thought of course it was for the weekend, and I thought of candy or a pretty handkerchief. Now I don't know, I'm sure."

The salesgirl picked up a pair of bronze book ends cast in the shape of ships. "These are useful," she said.

Mrs. Cheney adjusted her pince-nez and looked at the price tag. "Ten dollars," she said. "I don't think I want to pay as much as ten dollars."

"Well, now!" The salesgirl looked the table over brightly and picked up a brass dish that had a design in turquoise matrix. The dish had a twisted, irregular shape and was very heavy.

"Goodness!" Mrs. Cheney said. "What's that for?"

"It's a little all-purpose thing," the salesgirl said. "A dish."

"A dish for what?"

The salesgirl frowned. "Why, I suppose you could use it for almost anything," she said. "Salad, or anything."

"Oh, I don't think you could use it for salad," Mrs. Cheney said. "It's too small. I mean it would be too small for them. And they have things for salad. Do you think you could use it for nuts?"

"It would be perfect for nuts," the salesgirl said. "Just perfect."

Mrs. Cheney took the dish. The weight of it was more than she expected and she almost dropped it. "My, but it's heavy," she said. Her eyes grew slightly more animated. "Why, you'd never think to look at it it was so heavy. I think it would be very nice for nuts. Salted or any kind. How much is it?"

"Five dollars," the salesgirl said.

"It's unusual," Mrs. Cheney said. "If I bought it, I suppose it could be wrapped as a gift?"

"Oh, indeedy. We have lovely gift paper."

"What is it like?" Mrs. Cheney asked.

The salesgirl was enthusiastic. "Well, it's a sort of lacy, coppery design and tied with silver ribbon."

Mrs. Cheney nodded approvingly. "And if I decide on it, you'll be sure to remove the price? I would be embarrassed to death if you didn't remove the price."

"Oh, but certainly," the salesgirl said.

Mrs. Cheney smiled slightly. "Oh, I'm sure the store wouldn't be guilty of such a *faux pas*," she said graciously.

"And if she didn't want to use it for nuts, I suppose it would be useful in other ways."

"Oh, yes," the salesgirl said. "For nuts, or candy, or crackers."

"I don't think it would be so good for candy," Mrs. Cheney said. "They don't eat much candy, anyway. As a matter of fact, I can't seem to remember ever eating crackers there except perhaps with soup. I really can't remember."

"It's very unusual," the salesgirl said.

"Yes," Mrs. Cheney agreed, her voice positive. "I think it's unusual, too. So I think I will take it. I don't think they have anything like it at all. And you'll be sure to gift-wrap it *and* take off the price."

"Would you like to write out a card?" the salesgirl asked.

Mrs. Cheney thought a moment, then she said, "No. I'll just hand it to her, and there'll be no need for a card. I'll hand it to her when I get there." She reached in her bag and took out a five-dollar bill and five cents, which she handed to the girl. As she waited for the package to be wrapped, she walked slowly around the table, looking at the things. Her eyes were softer and she seemed to be seeing for the first time since she had stepped off the elevator.

When the salesgirl came back, Mrs. Cheney was humming softly to herself. "I've thought of an awfully cute little idea," she said. "I think I'll just run down to Fanny Farmer's and buy a half-pound of nuts. Then she'll *know*."

"That's a wonderful idea," the salesgirl said.

Mrs. Cheney took the package and smiled. "Well," she said gaily, "if she doesn't like it, she can bring it back. I don't care. Five dollars isn't exactly anything to be ashamed of."

People from Out of Town

THE Marlborough Garden Apartments were a block from Riverside Drive, far uptown, and the architect who designed them had allowed himself to be swayed by countless desires. A vacillating man, he wanted to make the most of the view of the river, which would be visible if he put corner windows on the northwest side of the building, but this would make the corresponding windows on the southwest side face on the dreary back of another apartment, and, as his intention was to design a group of buildings instead of one huge one, he was torn between a longing to do something homey and Elizabethan with stone, timber, and leaded panes and a sneaking suspicion that the future tenants might want glass bricks and plenty of light. He almost stubbornly clung to his idea of a group of buildings in the Elizabethan manner and compromised by making the windows larger than normal, which gave one the impression that whole sections of the apartment had been gouged out. Carried away by a fine enthusiasm for both atmosphere and air, he didn't bother about wall space and recklessly slashed away at his plans. In the rare places where there were no windows, he tucked in cunning little alcoves that gave the outside of the buildings a charming irregularity.

When he thought of the people who would occupy the

apartments, he imagined an assemblage of childless young couples with a minimum amount of furniture who would continue to practice a little restraint, artistically and morally, and not clutter up the place too much. He designed a courtyard garden with a fountain, and at the insistence of the owner, a Mr. Leibowitz, who had been born disillusioned, he grudgingly planned a playground with swings, sand piles, and slides, hoping as he did so that before it ever knew the horror of the patter of tiny feet it would fall into ruins and the jungle would claim it. Completed, the apartments were advertised as having 1½, 2½, 3½, and 4½ rooms.

The architect's dream of Utopia was ended when the tenants began to move in. They seemed more like squirrels than humans and arrived with numerous odd-looking bits that obviously wouldn't fit anywhere, let alone in a place designed for the maximum amount of light, air, and beauty. The best that could be said of their furniture, which either didn't match at all or matched only too well, was that it was just a little too good to throw away. They came loaded with mementos of their sordid pasts; they hung Dutch curtains at the kitchen windows; they put cribs or painted breakfast sets in the half-rooms and radios in the bookshelves; and the garden, which was meant to look like a bit of green from another world, was noisy with the blare of music when the windows were open and smelled of cooking. Nobody entered into the spirit of the thing at all. The architect visited the place one last time. It was going full blast and a little boy was throwing dirt and grass into the fountain.

The Carters leased Apartment 210. It had three and a

half rooms, which was a half-room more than they had had in the Copley Arms. It didn't take Ruth Carter long to decide what to do with the extra space. "We'll eat there," she said, "and keep Mickey's crib in the bedroom in the daytime and move it out into the living room at night, the way we've always done. It's a perfectly lovely place, and that little step going down into it just *makes* it, doesn't it?"

Roger Carter, who had been faintly repelled by the whole thing, looked at her flushed and excited face. "Well, it has more room," he admitted.

Most of the time, Roger Carter liked being married. He could even look back dispassionately and see exactly how it had happened. He had been out of college almost a year before he found a job with a large advertising agency, and by that time he was so eager to work, so tired of uncertainty that he plunged in with enthusiasm. Later he discovered that men were advanced to better positions by right of seniority and that it didn't matter at all whether you worked as hard as you could or whether you just slid along with the others. He rented a room with a kitchenette and planned to get his own meals; he sent home for his books and tried to feel self-sufficient.

When Ruth came to work at the agency he noticed her only because she was prettier, quieter, and dumber than the other girls. Although she had worked in offices since she was sixteen years old, she was never quite sure what was expected of her. One day, after she had made a particularly annoying blunder, he looked at her long enough to tell her what he thought of her. To his amazement, her eyes filled with tears. She hurried from the room and he was left feeling surprised and a little pleased. And that

night he asked her to go to dinner. He had imagined that when he married he would live in a remodelled apartment somewhere in the Village with a wife who could throw together inexpensive suppers for his friends. He had even pictured her lying back on a huge sofa, drink in hand, clad becomingly and daringly in dark-red lounging pajamas. It was impossible to see Ruth in this rôle. She was small, soft, and feminine. Even when he looked at her across a table in a restaurant, she seemed to have an aura of innumerable small things about her. Not that she clanked with charm bracelets or fussed with herself; on the contrary, her pretty arms were bare and her face almost free of makeup, but he felt everything that belonged to her assumed a personal value in her eyes. "What did I do with my handkerchief?" she would ask.

And instantly the square of linen became identified. It was the white handkerchief with her initials that her Aunt Rose had given her, or it was the flowered one that she had bought to go with her blue dress. Its loss would leave a gap.

She had no interest in the things she didn't possess. And until it became obvious that he was getting pretty serious about her, she treated him with a polite, sweet respect. She was not a girl who allowed you to kiss her lightly, and she was without guile.

From the first they were a family; they were never two young people who surprisingly found themselves tied together. They had a home from the start and all the things that went with it. It worried Ruth that they had never had a dining room, and when they moved into the Marlborough Gardens she bought a shiny maple breakfast table, chairs, and a narrow sideboard. "You see," she said happily, "we

gradually get everything. Maybe, when Mickey gets older, we can have an extra room for him."

She sat all afternoon in the playground while Mickey dug in the sand pile, and sometimes, in the evening, people came over for cards. On Sundays they wheeled the baby in his carriage along the Drive, because Ruth thought it would be undignified for Roger to sit in the playground in the midst of the women and children. Walking along on a clear day with the wind blowing from the river, he thought of the summers he used to spend in Connecticut and the beach there. He remembered the girls, brown and noisy, and the night that Mary Chapin got high and ran her car into a ditch. Then he would feel that there was something indecent about pushing a baby carriage, and he wondered if he looked like the other fathers, a little too neat in their good suits, as though the neglect of any small detail meant a step backward that might send them hurtling over into the chasm of complete indifference.

After these walks, Roger would sit at the shiny new maple table eating his Sunday supper. Everything in the house, from the way the furniture was arranged in the living room to the color of his neckties, was Ruth's choice. A few of his books were in the small bookshelf set between the windows, but the others lay in a box in the closet, to make room for the radio and the sets of books that Ruth liked because they looked dignified and matched. She saw to it that he lived in careful comfort, even denying herself the things she needed so that he, the house, and the baby would have what she felt was due them.

They had been living in the Marlborough Gardens for over a year when Bob Ellis and his wife came to town and

asked them to dinner downtown. Bob had been one of Roger's roommates at college, and Roger was pleased at the prospect of seeing him again and elated over the idea of a party that would not consist of cream cheese and jelly or spiced-ham sandwiches. Ruth made arrangements with the Y.W.C.A. for a girl to stay with Mickey and had her hair done. There was something charming in its usual disorder and she didn't look natural with the deep ridges around her face and the tight curls at the back of her neck. Roger surveyed her critically. "Comb it out a little," he advised.

"It will fly all over," she said. "And if I leave it this way tonight, it will stay in a week."

She slipped her evening dress over her head. It was not new, and as she had put on weight, it pulled slightly across her hips and breasts. It was a shiny taffeta with puff sleeves and two artificial roses on the shoulder. Her stockings were too heavy and she walked carefully in her high-heeled evening shoes. "Is it very cold?" she asked. "Or do you think I can wear my cape?"

Without waiting for an answer, she opened the window and put her head out. "Goodness, but it's blowing!" she exclaimed. She went to the closet and got out her good coat, the one with the beaver collar.

"I think I'd better wear this," she said. "No use getting pneumonia for the sake of looks. Besides, I can check it at the coatroom when we go in."

When they left, Mickey was having his supper, enchanted with the girl from the Y.W.C.A.

It was cold waiting for the bus and the wind blew Ruth's hair loose, so that it stood out wildly around her head. With her red cheeks and the bright blue of her taffeta

dress, she made Roger seem pale by comparison. In the bus she put her hand on his. "Isn't this fun?" she asked. "I can't remember *when* we've been downtown to dinner. And you look so nice. You do, really."

She smiled at him and he could see where her lipstick ended against the pale pink of her mouth. "We could have had them to dinner, I suppose," she went on. "We *should.* Maybe later in the week if they stay on. Have they any family?"

"I don't think so," Roger answered.

"Oh," she said. "That's too bad."

The bus had turned into the Drive. She looked out across the river and thought of Mickey and the nice girl from the Y.W.C.A., and remembered that they must be home by eleven. She glanced at Roger and wondered if he were enjoying himself. It was hard to tell about him at times.

The Ellises were waiting for them at a table set for four. Bob Ellis was short and plump and had a Midwestern accent, but Mrs. Ellis was as slim and sleek as a model in Bonwit Teller's window. He pumped Roger's hand and slapped him repeatedly on the back. "Roger, you old pirate!" he cried.

"Sh-h-h," Mrs. Ellis said. "Don't scream so."

She looked at Ruth and nodded. "Men are just little boys," she said.

"Oh, *aren't* they!" Ruth exclaimed. "That's what I keep telling Roger."

Ann Ellis reached for her drink. "Sit down, you two," she said.

Bob Ellis beamed at them. "This is great. This is like old times. What say we never go to bed?"

Ruth laughed. "That sounds all right to *me*," she said gaily. "But I don't know how it would sound to Mickey."

"Mickey?" Ann Ellis asked.

"Our little boy," Ruth explained. "We have someone staying with him tonight and she has to leave at eleven."

Bob Ellis stared at her curiously. "Well, the night's young. So what will it be?"

Ruth turned toward Ann Ellis. "You must see him," she said. "He's at his very cutest age. Just beginning to talk a little, and the things he says—well, you wouldn't believe the things he says."

"I'll have another Scotch," Ann told her husband.

"How about it, Roger, old boy? Scotch sound all right to you two? Waiter, four Scotch-and-sodas."

"I've been buying things and buying things all day long," Ann Ellis said. "And I'm bushed. You don't know what it's like to get to New York and see the shops, Mrs. Carter. I suppose you have some particular favorite, but I'm like a lost sheep."

Ruth frowned thoughtfully. "Well, I get the baby's things at Best's. And I usually get *my* things at Franklin Simon's. We have a charge account there."

"Oh," Ann Ellis said. "Come on, Bob, and dance with me."

Ruth watched her as she danced. The sleeves of her dress were long and the neck high. "Want to take a spin?" Roger asked.

The floor was very small and they were both glad when the orchestra started a rumba. "I guess that's that," Roger said, leading her back to their table.

They sat silently, sipping their drinks and watching the people around them.

When the Ellises returned to the table, Bob Ellis seemed subdued and nervous. His heartiness had left him and he seemed changed from a plump, jolly little man into a plump, fussy one. He finished his drink and ordered another, glancing nervously at his wife from time to time. She sat there looking around the room, not bothering to say much.

"Seen Ed Lovejoy lately?" Bob Ellis asked.

"Nope," Roger answered. "Not in over a year. What's he doing now?"

"I heard he was with the Frisbe outfit."

"Is that so?" Roger answered politely. "Well. Ever see Rip Pope?"

"Saw him in Michigan last summer," Bob Ellis said. "You remember Rip, Ann?"

"I suppose so," she said.

From their memories, the two men drew forth names and disposed of them. Ruth quietly listened to them talk, turning her head from one to the other, smiling and interested. They ordered their dinner, and when it came, Ann Ellis turned to Ruth. "What time is the floor show?" she asked.

"Oh, a floor show!" Ruth repeated. "That will be nice. I don't know what time it is, I'm sure. Roger, why don't you ask somebody for Mrs. Ellis?"

"Never mind," Ann said. "I thought you might know."

Her husband looked at her and when he spoke his voice was sharp. "Snap out of it," he told her. "You act as though you were asleep on your feet."

Ruth shook her head and laughed. "What men don't

understana is how tired a lot of shopping makes you feel. Do they, Mrs. Ellis? Goodness! By the time Christmas is over I'm about dead. And to take Mickey down to get a few things! Well, it's a job, I tell you."

Roger glanced quickly at his wife. Her smile was innocent and she was eating with enjoyment. "I got much the biggest lobster," she said, "and you love them so, Roger." She picked up a claw and put it on his plate. "I really couldn't eat it. Honestly."

The men grew silent and Ruth began to talk pleasantly. Did the Ellises get to New York often? They must find time to come up and see the apartment and the baby. What shows did they plan to see? Where were they staying? And people had such a funny idea about New Yorkers, who lived exactly the same as other people. In fact, Roger and she never ate out.

It was a relief when the floor show started. When it was over and the dance music started once more, Ruth got up. "Let's dance again," she said. She picked up her bag and started toward the floor. They danced silently around the room and when they reached a far corner, Ruth fumbled with her bag. "Here," she said, slipping some bills into Roger's hand.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"I want you to pay the check," she told him.

His hand closed on the bills. "O.K.," he said, drawing her closer. In spite of the stiff waves, her hair was soft and he pressed his cheek into it.

Back at the table, she smiled down at the Ellises. "We have to run," she explained. "I had no idea it was so late. Get the check, will you, darling, and I'll get my coat."

"Here, here!" Bob Ellis blustered. "This is my party!"

"Nonsense," Ruth said. "We did so want to have you at the house for dinner, but we understand how people like to eat out when they come to New York. People from out of town."

When they got outside it had begun to snow, and Ruth buttoned the beaver collar of her coat under her chin. She took Roger's arm and unhesitatingly started toward Fifth Avenue and the bus. Roger pulled her over to the curb and held up his hand. "Taxi!" he called.

Maybe it was the way he slipped as he got in the cab, or maybe it was the relief of being alone together with the snow whirling outside that made them laugh as they started uptown.

The Lilac Bush

WHEN Dorothy Sprague closed the front door, she was careful to use the antiqued wrought-iron latch so as not to leave fingerprints on the fresh white paint. It had rained the night before, and there were small pools on the newly seeded lawn and around the pink cement flagstones of the path that led to the garage. She stepped carefully in her tan-and-white saddle shoes, avoiding the muddy puddles. Under one arm she carried a bundle of soiled clothes wrapped in a sheet on which was pinned a neat laundry list.

In the garage she opened the door of her canary-colored Ford sedan and threw the laundry onto the back seat. Then she walked to the door of the garage and stood looking at the house. It rose, white and immaculate, from the dark earth, and she had the disconcerting feeling that it did not look at all like the water color submitted by the architect who designed it. The architect's sketch had depicted a charming white house with blue shutters and gracious pillars, surrounded by stately elms and a lawn which might have been made of Paris green and a superior quality of velvet. A man whose enthusiasms knew no bounds, he had dotted the lawn lavishly with shrubs and flowers, all blooming riotously. Unfortunately, he had put his visions down

in primary colors, and Mrs. Sprague in her faith had framed his dream and kept it.

Now she could see the lattice that should have been heavy with blue morning-glories effectively hiding the dish towels drying on the clothes reel. The lattice was spotted with mud, and there was not a sign of budding green beneath it. The ground that sloped from the house to the garage had been washed away in places, revealing barren spots of gravel, and the barberry bushes at the side of the house looked stunted and sick. She glanced up to her bedroom window and down to the ground again, where a few sticks of something grew. This was the lilac bush that had been planted to send the delicate scent of its lavender blossoms into her room, so that, in the first moment of awakening each morning, she would be instantly aware of the fact that Beauty was almost everything.

Poor soil and a reluctant New England spring had dealt heavy blows to Mrs. Sprague. It had been impossible to plant any shrubs until the frost was out of the ground, and in the drenching rains grass seed had rolled like quicksilver about the space set apart for lawn.

The Spragues had built their house on a flat stretch of land directly off the main road, and while there had been practically no grading to do, there had also, with the exception of a few clumps of red alder and several small maples; been no trees. This problem was temporarily solved for Mrs. Sprague by the architect, who pictured greenery with a lavish hand, and for a while she was content to live in the future. In fact, there had been a moment when Mrs. Sprague's ideas and the architect's dream met and mated. Mrs. Sprague remembered the moment well. She had been

sitting on the chintz-covered couch in the Talbot place, which she had rented for the summer, and the architect, a young man named Frisbie Jones, appeared at the door in Basque trousers and a striped orange pullover and placed the masterpiece they had conceived together in her hands. "Here is Still Waters!" he had cried. "Finished, perfect, and completely *you!*"

Their foreheads had touched as they bent over the enchanting water color of the house. It had been an immaculate conception. Mrs. Sprague was filled with a sort of ecstasy to think that Frisbie Jones had seen into her soul and found nothing worse than white paint, blue shutters with candlesticks cut out of their centers, slim Doric pillars, iron hinges, a watertight roof of red tile, a gravel driveway, a barely visible cement foundation, and a garden in full bloom. Mr. Jones was aware, too, of the exquisite distinctions between the charming and the practical, as a brief glance at the blueprints showed. He had an eye for wall plugs, linen closets, pantry space, and enough bathrooms. And while Mrs. Sprague felt that these rather prosaic details were not expressive of her personality, it was reassuring to know that in spite of his Basque trousers Mr. Jones had another side.

After he had left, still bubbling over with ideas, she fell back on the couch and laid the painting of the house face down on her substantial breasts. It was as though a child rested there.

She had kept faith with Mr. Jones through the long, tedious winter while the house took shape. She kept faith with him when the cellar flooded and the place became as chill and damp as a tomb. She was still speaking to him

when the front door warped and the Venetian blinds turned out to be an inch too narrow. Mr. Jones had an optimism that blinded her. It was not until he went back to New York with the check for his services in his pocket and she was faced with a weekend in the shrill newness of the house that doubt entered her mind. Within a half hour after Frisbie Jones drove away in his new car, Mr. Sprague had discovered that two of the closet doors wouldn't stay shut and that the wallpaper had begun to peel in the guest room. These, Mrs. Sprague told her husband bravely, were minor details, but when she stood at the window of the living room and looked out onto the vast expanse of mud, water, and dwarfed shrubbery, her heart turned to stone.

Now, a month later, the first feeling of dull resentment against the inadequate good earth had given way to a slow, smoldering anger. She almost hated the house, which seemed to have substance without permanence. She felt that her nostrils would never be free from the heavy odor of new paint and damp plaster. She inhaled deeply, and the smell clung and mingled with the scent of drenched black soil. She turned back toward the car, climbed in, and banged the door shut. As she backed down the driveway, small pebbles crunched under the tires and rattled against the fenders.

She drove slowly along the main road, through the self-conscious, trim little village, and branched into the west lane. At the last house on the lane, she brought the car to a stop. Mrs. Howard's house was weatherbeaten and bare of paint. Part of the roof had rotted away and been replaced by tar paper. The front porch was threaded with clotheslines heavy with the weight of wet sheets.

Mrs. Sprague pulled the laundry from the back seat of the car and carried it to the side door of the house. Sniffing a faint fragrance in the air, she set the bundle on the sagging steps and walked toward the back of the house. Near the gray clapboards was a lilac bush covered with dark purple blossoms. The bush grew higher than the roof of the house and its branches were sturdy and gnarled. She stepped over rusty tin cans and bits of broken glass until she stood under the soft, green leaves. Cool, fluttering flowers from the sprays fell on her hair and brushed her cheek. Reaching up, she pulled the branches down. She stood still, burying her face in them and filling her lungs with their clean perfume. Then she let the branches go and walked back to the side door.

Mrs. Howard was ironing and the kitchen was hot. Unwashed dishes were piled in the iron sink and a washing machine chugged in the corner by the stove. "I saw you walk by the window," Mrs. Howard said brightly. "Everybody that comes by seems to want to have a look at the lylocks. I think they're real nice myself."

Mrs. Sprague put the laundry on the floor. "Yes," she said.

"Pick yourself a bunch when you go." Mrs. Howard set the iron on end and took a bundle wrapped in newspapers from the kitchen table. "There's no starch in the shirts, like you told me."

"How much do I owe you?" Mrs. Sprague asked.

"A dollar and forty cents."

Mrs. Sprague opened her bag and took a dollar, a quarter, a dime, and a nickel and laid them on the ironing board. "I'd love a bunch, if you don't mind."

"Help yourself," Mrs. Howard said. She picked up the iron and went on with her work.

Mrs. Sprague closed the door behind her and went down the steps. She walked to her car and set the clean laundry carefully on the back seat. Then, taking off her gloves, she went back to the lilac bush and reached up once more for the branches. At first she picked the sprays slowly, taking care not to twist the stems or crush the blossoms, but as she picked she worked faster, until she was ripping huge branches from the bush. The wood on the heavy trunk lay bare in spots and she could smell the odor of the green, fresh wood. As she tore the lilacs from the bush she let them fall to the ground, and as she walked around the bush she stepped on them. Her hands were stained and sore, and she panted as she grabbed at the branches that grew almost beyond her reach. Tiny petals clung to her sweater and covered her hair. She stooped and gathered the lilacs from the ground until her arms were full. Then, leaving the ground strewn with sprays she could not carry, she hurried to her car. Her face was flushed and hot, and the scent of the blossoms in the closeness of the car was sickening. Leaning over, she opened the window and looked back at the lilac bush. It swayed in the breeze, still burdened with its blossoms, alive and sturdy. She opened the door of the car and swept the lilacs out onto the road. But, although she opened all the windows and drove swiftly home, their scent lingered on her sweater and in her hair.

V Is for a Lot of Things

IT WAS very hot in Mrs. Buell's garden, and as she knelt transplanting cabbages from the flat in which she had started them early in March to the bed that ran parallel with the barberry hedge, the sun beat fiercely on her back. At the first sign of spring, she had sent to Sears Roebuck for a denim suit called, appropriately, the Lady Hercules. It consisted of a jacket, trousers, and a visored cap, and Mrs. Buell had hoped that she would look like one of those wonderful Russian women in it—the women who built subways and did men's work. Instead, she looked more like Casey Jones, and, as no amount of washing had softened the denim, which hung stiffly below her knees and from her shoulders, she had trouble moving her arms and legs.

As she set out a sickly cabbage plant, she remembered that last year, in the same spot, blue laceflower had moved gently in the breeze from the shore, and she sighed. She raised her eyes and looked at the rows of vegetables set in the hard earth. Although she and her husband, Harry, had used string to make sure that the rows would be straight, they had a snakelike appearance. This, she told herself, was of no importance, and she tried to keep her mind fixed on the canning season and the dozens of jars of vegetables that would be stored in the cellar. It was June, but neither Mrs. Buell nor Harry had forgotten the winter. "This coming

winter," she had told Harry firmly, "we'll simply ignore our points, *really*. I mean except for the things we can't grow ourselves, like butter. But I certainly never intend to buy another can of tomatoes again when it's perfectly simple to grow them ourselves." Stiff with resolution, she had sent away for booklets on how to winter-store carrots, onions, cabbage, and turnips, and for booklets about canning and preserving. She had ruthlessly changed her annual flower bed into a vegetable garden, and in May, she and Harry had started to turn the ground over, mixing it with lime and bone meal as the booklet said. Harry had even had the soil analyzed, but when the report came, he hadn't understood it.

The truth was that Mr. and Mrs. Buell missed Andrew Sini, a Sicilian who had worked for them for ten years. Andrew had lived in Monroe, Connecticut, since 1916, but he spoke very little English. Mrs. Buell had grown accustomed to pointing out things to him, and their conversations throughout the years had been simple. It was not until last Christmas that she had found out that Andrew was not a citizen. He had stopped by to get the package of toys that Mrs. Buell had wrapped for his eight children and she had patriotically said something about how wonderful it was to be a citizen of this glorious country, and he had laughed merrily. "Me no citizen," he stated flatly.

Mrs. Buell had been frankly shocked. She had even tried to argue with him, but he had not understood. When he had gone away happily with the package of toys, she had spoken to Harry about it. "Really, Harry," she had said. "That's the whole trouble with everything. When you

think of that Andrew Sini living here all these years and not even *trying* to become a citizen! Well, it makes you wonder. Do you suppose he even pays *taxes*?" Mr. Buell, who was sleepy after Christmas dinner, said he supposed not. So in the spring, when Andrew stopped by to uncover the roses, Mrs. Buell told him firmly he needn't bother. "America is for Americans," she had said. "Andrew, you must realize your responsibilities."

When Andrew's oldest son was drafted, Mrs. Buell thought hopefully that Andrew would have to do something now, and she waited to hear what had happened. But Andrew merely went to work for Mrs. Mabon at sixty cents an hour instead of the fifty that Mrs. Buell had always paid him. There was nothing for her to do, she decided, but put him out of her mind.

Mrs. Buell set out the last cabbage plant. There was no breeze and small gnats hovered over her head and stung her face. Her Lady Hercules suit caught her under the arms and pulled across her breasts. She took a cigarette from a package she had tucked in her hip pocket. It was mashed flat and she rolled it into shape. The backs of her hands were freckled and her nails were dry and broken. She unbuttoned her jacket so her pink rayon brassière showed at the top. She lit her cigarette and sat looking dully around the garden. In the middle of the vegetables she had set out red, white, and blue cornflowers in the shape of a large V, and as she smoked she fastened her eyes on it desperately.

Behind her she heard a light footstep, and, turning, she saw that Andrew Sini was standing looking at the garden. He wore a faded soft blue shirt and old flannel trousers,

and he squinted in the sun. "Well, Andrew," she said. "How do you do?"

He frowned and shook his head. "Garden no good," he said.

"Oh, I wouldn't say it was no good," Mrs. Buell said. "Mr. Buell and I think it's very good. Quite the nicest we've had. At least, it's the largest. After all, it's got everything in it and it's sunnier than the little kitchen garden we used to have in back of the garage."

Andrew stooped and took one of the cabbage plants from the row and held it between his rough brown fingers. His touch was tender. "Is sick," he said. He took a handful of earth and, lifting it to his nose, inhaled deeply.

Mrs. Buell watched him nervously. "Doesn't it smell right?" she asked.

He threw the earth to the ground. "Is no good," he said. "I fix her."

Mrs. Buell shook her head. "Now, Andrew," she said, "we've been through all that. I've told you all about it. There is a war, and your own son is fighting in it, and *you* aren't even a citizen. You should be ashamed of yourself."

"I fix her," Andrew said.

"Besides," Mrs. Buell went on, "you're working for Mrs. Mabon."

Andrew's face broke into dozens of fine lines and his black eyes curled up at the corners. "Not me," he said. "She too smart. You dumb. I better here."

Mrs. Buell reached up her hand and smoothed her hair under her Lady Hercules cap. "I *am* dumb," she said, flattered. "Goodness! You know and I know that I've never actually had to work in the garden. I mean I had the ideas,

but I didn't actually have to work, whereas this is the first year, this is the first year Mrs. Mabon's been able to have anyone to help her. I suppose Mr. Mabon's very well fixed now that there's a war on. Converting his factory and everything."

Andrew looked down at her and smiled. "What you do in pants?" he asked.

"Oh, these!" Mrs. Buell smoothed the stiff creases of her suit.

"You look damn funny," he said. He threw back his head, his black eyes closed, and he began to laugh.

Unaccountably, Mrs. Buell felt better. She stood up and brushed the dirt from her trouser legs. "Look, Andrew," she said. "I'll take you in to New Haven and you take out your first papers. That's what I'll do. And I'll teach you, Andrew, so you'll know what to say when they ask you questions. You understand, Andrew? *First* papers."

"Sure," he said. He pointed to the V of cornflowers. They were not yet in bloom. "What you do?"

"That," Mrs. Buell said, "is a V—a red, white, and blue V for Victory."

"Is no good," Andrew said.

"It's not exactly straight," Mrs. Buell admitted. "But that isn't the point. It's a V for Victory."

Andrew Sini made a V with his thumb and forefinger. "I fix her," he said.

"Well," Mrs. Buell said doubtfully, "you fix her, but whether you like it or not, I'm going to teach you so you can take out your first papers."

"Sure," he said.

"I'm not positive what they ask, but I'll find out," Mrs.

Buell said. "I know one thing, though. Who is the President of the United States?"

Andrew bowed his head in thought. "Woodrow Wilson," he answered at last, triumphantly.

"No, Andrew," Mrs. Buell said. "The President of the United States is named Roosevelt—Franklin D. Roosevelt. I don't intend to discuss politics with you, so all you need to know is that his name is Franklin D. Roosevelt. Now, what's his name? What is the name of the President of the United States?"

This time Andrew answered more easily, like a child who has mastered a problem. "Woodrow Wilson."

"Look, Andrew," Mrs. Buell said. "Woodrow Wilson *was* President of the United States. But now he isn't. The President's name is Franklin D. Roosevelt. Do you understand?"

"Sure," Andrew said. "You go. I gotta work."

"All right," Mrs. Buell said. "But remember, now. *First* papers." She turned and walked away a few steps, then called back over her shoulder, "How is your boy?"

Andrew was stooping over the earth. His short brown hands moved quickly among the plants. "He's in big fight," he said. He straightened up and drew his finger across his throat. "Killa everybody."

His face shone with pride, and Mrs. Buell looked away quickly. "Well, that's lovely," she said. "He's a good boy. And you be good, too. You just remember the name of the President of the United States for today. And tomorrow I'll teach you something else."

"Sure," Andrew said. "Woodrow Wilson."

Mrs. Buell walked back to the house. Harry was on the

sun porch painting the furniture, and she stopped at the doorway. "Andrew's back," she said.

"I saw him," her husband said. "He came past the window."

"He's going to take out his first papers," Mrs. Buell said. "And I started to teach him the name of the President, but I don't know whether he'll learn or not. He keeps saying 'Woodrow Wilson.' "

She walked to the window that faced the yard and looked out across the garden. Andrew Sini was on his knees transplanting the cornflowers that were supposed to be planted in the shape of a V. She leaned up against the window frame, and as she watched, the V began to take shape. The lines of the green plants were sharp against the brown earth. She watched until the V was finished, and she saw Andrew drag the hose across the lawn and water it gently.

"I suppose it's all right," Mrs. Buell said to her husband. "After all, he did say Woodrow Wilson, and Woodrow Wilson was a fine man in his way. I mean, after all, it isn't as though he had said Warren Harding or someone like that."

Her heart that beat under the left pocket of her Lady Hercules suit grew soft. "I mean, it isn't as though Andrew Sini wasn't a *good* man," she said.

Ash Blonde

SHE had never been a golden blonde. When she was young, her hair had been a sort of flat yellow with a greenish tinge, which she lightened by surreptitious peroxide rinses. Yet, like all women whose hair is the slightest degree fairer than a light brown, she thought of herself as a blonde, and had acted accordingly. It didn't matter at all to her that she didn't measure up to the popular conception of the type she adopted—she was a blonde at heart. She was slender but not willowy; her eyes were small and set rather closely together, and their shade of grayish blue did not match the gentian. She went in for pastels, and although she reluctantly put aside a yearning to be the stately, buxom blonde type, she did the best she could to make herself a mere slip of a thing. Circumstances helped her. She was an only child, and while her parents lived they treated her with sweet indulgence. Her mother spent hour after hour making exquisite underthings for her. Until they died she was their little Hennie.

She lived on in the big old-fashioned apartment with Annie, the family maid, who lovingly carried on the legend, ironing fine pleats into Hennie's nightdresses and sewing blue bows on them. Annie served her dainty lunches and made cookies cut in heart shapes; she reminded her to wear her rubbers on rainy days and made her drink hot milk

at night; she made embroidered sachets scented with violet for Hennie's bureau drawers and fed the two canaries, telling Hennie she was like a small, yellow bird herself. On the days when the girls descended upon Hennie for tea, Annie made countless little sandwiches of watercress, cream cheese, and ginger, and tiny cupcakes with pale-pink icing. There was something about Hennie's apartment that made the stout, middle-aged women feel young again. It was so exactly as it had always been when their club had met there after school. And Hennie seemed the same, the youngest of the crowd, the smallest, the daintiest, and the silliest.

They didn't notice that she had grown thinner and thinner. Her movements were still quick, but they had lost the darting, birdlike quality she affected and had become fluttering and hesitant. Yet she had never felt the passage of time. Year after year she did the same things, selecting her clothes with the same fastidiousness, going daily throughout the winter to extension courses at Columbia University, where she sat in the classrooms taking notes, listening with a sort of blank intensity.

Once a week she took the Madison Avenue bus downtown, to have her hair done. This was one thing she had never allowed Annie to do for her. Even her mother had not known about the peroxide rinses, or, if she had known, she had never mentioned them. And although permanent waves and finger waves had long been in common use, Hennie still had her hair waved with an iron.

Friday was the day set aside for her hair, and this Friday in November was cold, gray, and drizzling. It was pleasant to walk into the warmth of the beauty parlor and be shown to her own particular booth, where Miss Elsie was waiting.

Miss Elsie was plump and dark and efficient, and when Hennie came into the booth she discreetly pulled the curtains closed. They had a silent agreement that Miss Hennie's rinse was not to be mentioned unless absolutely necessary and was then to be referred to as "your softener."

Hennie took off her coat and put it on a hanger and sat down in the leather chair, which faced a big mirror and the washbasin. There was a bright light overhead. Her nose looked pinched and red from the cold and her hair under the white glare looked very gray. As the rinse was not a dye, it always faded toward the end of the week. Miss Elsie felt Hennie's limp curls with an experienced hand. She ran a comb through them until they hung down low on Hennie's neck. "How do you like that effect?" she asked.

Hennie frowned into the mirror. Her hair fell forward and softened the lines of her face and neck. "What do you think?" she asked.

"I like it," Miss Elsie told her positively. "Look, I could put the curls in tight and then fluff them out when I comb them and give you the effect of a long bob. A long bob is very youthful, and it suits you."

"Very well," Hennie said. She leaned back and closed her eyes.

It was two hours before her hair was done, and she felt rested and refreshed. The clean curls were soft against her neck and her cheeks were flushed from the heat of the room.

"There now," Miss Elsie said, with satisfaction. "You look lovely. And your hair's getting to be a real ash blonde."

"Ash blonde," Hennie repeated. "Well! Quite a fashionable shade. Almost the next thing to a platinum blonde."

"Better," Miss Elsie assured her. "Platinum blondes are out. Definitely."

Out in the street, Hennie walked briskly to the bus. It was still drizzling and she held her umbrella close to her head as she tripped along. Her hair, bobbing under her hat, gave her a carefree feeling and she shook her head so that the curls hung forward around her face.

The bus was crowded and she edged her way to the rear and stood with her umbrella over her arm, hanging to the back of one of the seats. Looking down, she saw a young girl sitting on the aisle. The girl wore a small felt hat and a raincoat buttoned tight around her chin, and her hair hung to her shoulders. It was wet from the rain and it was ash blonde. Hennie smiled to herself. She threw her shoulders back and stood erect, swaying with the movement of the bus. Her own raincoat was a soft, transparent rose, and she thought with satisfaction of her tiny feet in their snug rubbers. It was the day the girls would be over for tea, and she wondered what they would think of her new long bob. She glanced again at the young girl, taking in every detail of her costume. Really, she thought, we look quite alike, except that her raincoat is blue.

The bus came to a sudden stop and Hennie took a quick step forward to steady herself. She bumped against the young girl, who looked up and smiled. Hennie smiled back and shook her head in a merry apology. Once more she felt the curls, soft and comforting against her face.

"Oh!" the young girl murmured. "I'm sorry."

She arose and motioned Hennie toward her seat. For a moment Hennie stared at her blankly, not understanding. Then, catching the approving glance of the woman who sat near the window, she knew. She hurriedly slid into the seat and her cheeks flushed. "Thank you," she said coldly.

Broken Heart

MRS. FORBES looked up from the book she was reading. "What are you poking around in my desk for?" she asked.

Her son did not turn around but went on fumbling with the papers in the top drawer. His voice, when he spoke, sounded muffled. "I want some writing paper."

"Well, all right," she said, "although I can't see why on earth you want writing paper. There's note paper in the blue box to the left. I thought you were going out."

He found the box and opened it. "Oh, gosh!" he exclaimed. "This is blue. Haven't you any other?"

"I thought you were going out," she repeated. "I thought you were going over to Mollie's."

"I can't use *blue*," he said. He took a sheet of paper whose edges were perforated so that it would fold into an envelope and held it under the light. "It looks sort of gray, though."

"Didn't you go to Mollie's?" Mrs. Forbes asked.

"No," he said.

He left the room and climbed the stairs to the third floor. He walked slowly and heavily, holding onto the railing. He recalled, with a pain so acute that it was almost pleasure, how a little over an hour ago he had run down these same stairs on his way to keep his date with Mollie. He hadn't

seen her for a week, not since he had told her how dumb he thought she was to fool around with a guy like Chalk Adams. He had deliberately stayed away to give her time to think over the wisdom of his opinions, and then tonight, before dinner, he had called and asked her casually for a date. Thinking back, he remembered that her voice had sounded funny when he talked to her. She had said he could come over, but a blind man would have known that something had gone screwy. He must have been crazy, he thought, to try to boss a girl like Mollie, and he was horrified at the things he had dared say to her. Like the dope he was, he had gone blithely to her house tonight prepared to listen tolerantly to her halting confession that she had been wrong and he had been right, and his world had been torn asunder. She had just wanted to see him, she said, to tell him that he needn't come round any more, or call her, or anything. She was sick of fresh kids. As she talked to him, the bottom dropped out of his stomach and he couldn't say a word. He had stood there and let her go on and on. And then he had picked up his hat and coat from the chair and said, "O.K."

The minute he was out in the street, hundreds of words rushed into his mind, and he wanted to go back and talk to her. But he was afraid that if he saw her again, the words would vanish, and he walked on home, his coat over his arm, not noticing the bitter cold. By the time he got to his house, his mind was clear and he decided that he would write her a letter she would never forget—a concise, clear letter that would state with dignity what he felt.

On the third floor, he glanced toward his sister Carol's door and saw that it was closed. He went quietly to his

room and shut the door, so that Carol wouldn't see his light and bother him with a lot of fool questions as to why he was home and what had happened to his date. He took a pad of paper from his desk and sat down to write in pencil. He wrote "Dear Mollie," "Mollie dear," and "Mollie." The words that swam in his brain wouldn't seem to flow down to his arm, and he sat for a long time staring at the sheet of paper. Then he scratched out what he had written and began over again.

"Mollie," he wrote. "Tonight seems like a bad dream to me as I sit here alone in my room. It is midnight, and I have been trying to read, but the words just didn't seem to make sense somehow. I tried to concentrate on the book I spoke to you about a week ago on the European situation, and I was struck with the awful futility of the inconsequential turmoil compared to the situation in regard to you that now confronts me. We never know what we have missed until it is gone, do we? That is human nature, I guess. I can't comprehend that what we have had is gone forever. I was stunned and speechless tonight as you may have noticed and was incapable of speech. I was afraid if I let myself go I might say too much—or too little. The things you said to me cut deep and I felt as though I had been kicked by a golden mule. Can't we talk this whole situation over again Mollie at any time you say. I freely apologize for anything I may have said about you or Chalk. I would never have said the things I did about him had I known you considered him a friend and I profoundly admire you for standing by a friendship no matter what the opinion I may personally have for Chalk may be. So when can I see you again Mollie? I will be waiting to hear from

you and no matter what happens will never forget you. Yours ever—"

He read the draft over carefully and then smoothed the note paper he had taken from his mother's desk and took out his fountain pen. When he had copied the letter, he folded and addressed it and took a stamp from his wallet. The stamp was creased and the glue had worn off the back. He spread some paste on it and tried to stick it on the letter, but it slipped and left a dirty mark.

He left the letter lying on his desk and went downstairs again, carrying the first draft in his hand. His mother was still reading on the couch. "What are you up to now?" she asked.

He sat down at the desk, took another sheet of paper, and carefully copied the letter once more. It was only half past nine and he remembered that he had written Mollie that it was midnight, but he trusted to luck that she wouldn't notice the postmark. It was only a few doors to the mailbox, and he slipped the letter in the slot and went on to the drugstore. He felt better now that he had written the letter and he did not see how Mollie could miss being impressed by its dignified sincerity. He had a Coke and walked slowly home. Carol was standing in the vestibule looking in her bag for her keys.

"Hello, what are you doing home so early?" she asked.

"Ask me another," he retorted.

"Don't be so fresh," she said. "I just did a favor for you. I mailed that letter that was on your desk."

He took a step back and leaned against the door. "You did what?" he said.

"I mailed that letter that was on your desk."

Two blue envelopes danced before his eyes, two letters exactly alike down to the last comma, obviously copied from an original one. He could see Mollie's wicked eyes as she read the two notes and compared them. The pieces of his broken heart came together with a sharp click. He faced his sister in the dim light of the vestibule. "I could kill you!" he said.

Peals of feminine laughter rang inside his head.

Sometimes It Relaxes You

RITA CROSBY looked anxiously at her husband. He stood in front of the bureau in his shirtsleeves, knotting his tie. His head was thrown back slightly and he was frowning. "Maybe we'd better not go," she said. "Where do you feel badly, *exactly*?"

"Nonsense!" Don Crosby said. He turned his head toward her and winced. "There's nothing the matter with me. Nothing really the matter. Of course, I don't feel like fighting a cage full of tigers, but I don't mind playing a little bridge with Ellen and George for a while."

"Is it your head?" she asked.

He felt his head carefully. "No," he told her, "it doesn't seem to be my head. It's more in back of my eyes, sort of."

"I don't think it could be your stomach, either," she said. "I mean, you enjoyed your dinner, didn't you?"

"I just thought I'd better eat. I wasn't really hungry." He took his coat from the back of the chair and slipped his arms into the sleeves. "Catches me in the back when I move," he said.

She went over to him and smoothed his collar. "Now, you're sure you think it's all right to go?"

"Do me good. Sometimes it relaxes you to go out."

She opened the top drawer of the bureau and took out a wool scarf. "Let me tuck this across your chest." She

wrapped it snugly around his neck, smoothing it under his coat.

It was only two blocks from their apartment to the Elliots'. Mrs. Crosby took her husband's arm as they walked. From time to time she looked up at him and smiled, and patted his coat sleeve reassuringly.

At the Elliots', the bridge table was already set up in the living room and Ellen was counting the cards. "Hello, you two," she said. "There's a joker in here and I can't find it."

"Hello," Mrs. Crosby said. "We almost didn't come. Don isn't feeling up to snuff."

"Nonsense!" Mr. Crosby said.

George Elliot walked over to the window, pulled down the shade, and felt the radiator. "Plenty of heat," he said. "You don't want to monkey around if you're coming down with flu."

"Maybe you don't feel like playing," Mrs. Elliot said.

Mr. Crosby pulled a large upholstered chair over to the bridge table and sat down. He leaned over and spread the cards across the table. "Let's cut."

"Well, you're being a sport about it, I must say," Mrs. Elliot told him. She drew the ace of hearts. "Looks like I get the deal."

"Sure you're not in a draft now, Don?" George Elliot asked.

"Don't bother about me," Mr. Crosby answered. "I'm O.K."

"Marian Ford's mother is in the hospital with pneumonia," Mrs. Elliot said. "It's this change of weather."

Mrs. Crosby looked at her and shook her head. "What do you bid, Ellen?"

After the first rubber, which the Crosbys lost, Mr. Crosby asked if he might change his seat. "There's a sort of draft on the back of my neck," he said. "Unless you think the cards are running your way of the room."

"Oh, goodness! We're not superstitious," Mrs. Elliot told him. "But if you begin to feel too badly, just say the word and we can stop."

"It's nothing," Mr. Crosby said. He put his head in his hands and rubbed his eyes. "My eyeballs feel like lumps of coal."

It was a few minutes before he was settled on the couch, where Mr. Elliot had sat, with a cushion tucked in the small of his back. He lit a cigarette, took one puff, and put it out. "Tastes funny," he said.

"You don't mind if we keep the winning cards?" Mr. Elliot asked. "Probably nothing in the idea anyway."

The Crosbys won the second rubber, and Mr. Crosby took the cushion away from his back and tossed it to the end of the sofa. At the end of the third rubber, which they won also, he was sitting upright on the edge of the couch.

"Well," Mrs. Elliot said brightly, "I guess I was wrong about the cards. They do seem to be running one way."

Mr. Crosby laughed. "Nothing to those superstitions! But I can move just as well as not." He turned his head from side to side and experimented with two deep breaths.

It was generally agreed that he had better not move from the sofa. During the fourth rubber the Crosbys made one grand slam not vulnerable, one little slam vulnerable, and set the Elliots four tricks on a five-club bid.

Adding up the score, Mr. Crosby looked flushed, but it

was a healthy flush. "Well, how about it?" he asked. "Want to try another?"

Mrs. Elliot picked up the cards. "Now, you just can't play any more," she said. "You've been a good enough sport as it is." She put the cards in their box and stood up. "I made a few sandwiches, if anybody is hungry. Would you like a little pineapple juice, Don? Sometimes it feels nice and cool to your throat."

"Nope," he answered. "Not for me, thanks. What kind of sandwiches you got, Ellen?"

"Ham," she said. "With mustard."

"That sounds great," he said. "As a matter of fact, I wasn't very hungry for dinner." He finished adding up the score. "Plus thirty-two. Three-twenty apiece. Not so bad for a sick man."

Mr. Elliot took a five-dollar bill, a one-dollar bill, and some change from his pocket and laid them on the table. The bills were new and crisp. Mr. Crosby picked them up and folded them neatly in his wallet. He jingled the silver in his hand. "Fortunes of war," he said pleasantly. His face was pink, his eyes were clear, and his hand was steady as he lit a cigarette. He smiled amiably at them all.

"I could do with a ham sandwich and a cup of coffee," he said. "Feed a cold and starve a fever."

He jingled the silver in his hand again and put it in his trouser pocket. "Plus thirty-two," he repeated. "Not so bad for a sick man."

Mrs. Elliot turned and left the room. The kitchen door was a swinging one and made no noise when she slammed it.

Haunted House

THE three women sat at the bridge table waiting for Libby MacKnight. She was usually late, as she lived near Mount Kisco and had difficulty with the trains. Helen Thomas looked at the clock. It was almost half past two. "*This* is the limit," she said. "I told her quarter *of* two, because I knew she'd be late. I thought that would get her here by two, at least."

"I don't know why she wanted to move out there, anyway," Laura Ward said.

Helen Thomas pulled her chair closer to the table and spread the cards. "Let's cut," she said. "I'll cut for Libby."

There was a ring at the door, and in a few minutes a small, plump, pink-cheeked woman came into the room. "I'm late," she said breathlessly. She took off her hat and smoothed her hair. "I missed the train I intended taking and had to wait for the next. I've been in a perfect dither all day."

"We cut for you," Helen Thomas told her. "You play with me."

Mrs. MacKnight moved a straight chair away from the table and pulled a low, upholstered one over in its place. "Do you mind?" she asked. "Those straight chairs of yours do something to the base of my spine. Now, if I can have a cushion, I'll be all set."

"Your deal," Mrs. Ward said.

Libby MacKnight opened her bag and took out a cigarette case. "I've been through the most amazing experience. You'll think I'm making it up when I tell you."

"Now, Libby, *really*," Allie Bronson said. "We've been waiting for hours as it is."

"It won't take a minute, and it's an amazing story. I can deal while I'm telling it. It was like this. These people asked us to dinner."

"What people?" Helen Thomas asked.

"These people we know. They're perfectly charming. He used to be a professor, and they have the loveliest place. Ancient, and simply swimming in atmosphere."

"Do they play bridge?" Allie Bronson asked.

"No," Libby MacKnight said shortly, "they don't. They sit around and talk, *and* they have something to talk about. Anyway, they asked us over for dinner and they never mentioned a thing about their house. If they had, I might have been expecting something of the sort, and that might explain it. We were sitting in the living room sipping our sherry, when the door suddenly opened."

She looked at the three women and paused dramatically.

"Well?" Helen Thomas asked.

"There was no one there!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Libby!" Allie Bronson exclaimed. "I suppose now you're going to say that the house was haunted."

"Wait," Mrs. MacKnight said. Her voice was almost a whisper. "Of course, that was nothing. A door might easily open by itself. I didn't think anything of it at all. I simply asked Mrs. Torrance—that's this woman's name—if she

minded if I closed the door, as I felt a draft. Well, she looked at her husband and they both smiled. I got up and shut the door, and I hadn't even *sat down* when the door opened again!"

"*Really*, Libby!" Helen Thomas exclaimed impatiently. "The catch was probably loose."

"That isn't all. When the door opened, we all sort of laughed, and Mrs. Torrance said that she guessed it wasn't much use."

"I'd like to meet her," Laura Ward said.

"Well," Libby MacKnight went on, "they acted so strangely about it that I didn't say anything more, but I began to feel funny."

"It's probably something to do with their radio," Allie Bronson said. "I read somewhere about a man that got all sorts of radio programs through his *radiator*. Isn't that odd?"

"They haven't got a radio," Mrs. MacKnight said. "They *loathe* radios, both of them, and I can't say I blame them." Some of the pinkness had gone out of her cheeks and her voice seemed subdued. "Well, that was all that happened before dinner. But *after* dinner we were sitting in the living room again, and the maid came in to say she was leaving."

"For good?" Helen Thomas asked.

"Certainly not for good. She goes home every night."

"How inconvenient!"

"Your Hilda used to go home at night," Libby MacKnight retorted. "So after the maid had gone we heard a terrible crash in the kitchen. I can't describe it exactly, except that it was this terrible crash and then a *peculiar* silence. I nearly jumped out of my skin. And neither Mr. Torrance

nor Mrs. Torrance paid the slightest bit of attention to it. I said, 'Goodness, what was that?' And Mrs. Torrance said the maid must have left the window open or something."

"Who was that tenor who used to be able to break a glass by just singing at it?" Mrs. Bronson asked.

"After that," Mrs. MacKnight went on determinedly, "I could have sworn I heard footsteps. Finally I asked Mrs. Torrance casually if anything had ever *happened* in the house in the past. A murder or some great tragedy. And she said not that she knew of."

"Personally, I don't think it's healthy to let one's imagination run away with one," Helen Thomas said.

"It wasn't my imagination. And while the Torrances didn't say much, *I* thought they acted very strangely."

"There was all that talk about Houdini a few years ago," Mrs. Bronson said, "and he never came back. I think if anyone could have gotten back, he could. When nothing happened about him, I put the whole thing out of my mind and haven't given it a thought since."

"There was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle," Mrs. MacKnight reminded her.

"Oh, *him*! He was hipped on the subject. Some people will believe anything."

"Just the same, it was very strange," Mrs. MacKnight said stubbornly.

Helen Thomas picked up her cards and began sorting them hurriedly. To anyone who knew her, it was obvious that she had at least five honor tricks.

"I couldn't sleep for wondering about it," Mrs. MacKnight persisted. "And even Harry couldn't explain it,

and you know how Harry is about such things. *I* think their house is *haunted*, and *I* think they know it."

"Your bid, Libby," Helen Thomas said.

Mrs. MacKnight looked at her hand and sighed. "I'll pass."

"Pass," Mrs. Ward echoed.

"I'll bid *two* spades," Helen Thomas said. Her voice was loud and clear. "Did you hear that, Libby? *Two* spades."

Autograph

THEY had all changed but Johnny Sewell. He stood in the center of the room looking the same as he had fifteen years ago, his bleached, wiry hair brushed back from his forehead, his blue eyes as clear and untroubled as a child's. As he was much taller than the other men, he seemed more impressive, the way a skyscraper is impressive—not for its fine details or the purity of its line but merely because it is bigger than the buildings which surround it. His voice was high-pitched and flat and had a curious, penetrating tone. When he laughed, he threw his head back, his face grew red, and it seemed as though he would choke. Yet for all this spectacular build-up, his laugh, when it came, had no mirth.

The men watched him, fascinated. It was as though his bigness, his blondness, and his enthusiasm had cast a spell over them; they laughed with him, louder than they normally did, and fished about in their minds for a reminiscence to top one of his. Their anxiety made them look softer and older by contrast.

It had been Russ Bowers who suggested that they should get together for a reunion after fifteen years. He had come on from Denver for a visit and had brought his son, Bink, who was thirteen, with him. The night they arrived, he had called Nick Farnsworth and told him that his principal

reason for coming East was to see the old gang. Nick Farnsworth was doubtful. He hadn't heard of most of them for years, he said. But Russ Bowers had assured him that he could find them.

As a matter of fact, he had sort of kept up with them all. And Nick had said that it was a funny thing how you were more apt to keep up with the people you used to know when you lived a couple of thousand miles away. So together they had rounded them up—Hank Holbrook, Don Gates, Poopoo Thompson, and Johnny Sewell. Because they decided to meet at Nick's house and there was a Mrs. Farnsworth, their wives had been invited, too, and Russ Bowers had asked if it would be all right to bring Bink.

"I want him to meet Johnny," he explained. "The kid's been raised on stories about Johnny. Good old Johnny! I wonder if he's changed?"

Yet he felt almost embarrassed, seeing Johnny, to discover how little he had changed. It was disconcerting to have the years roll away so suddenly and to find Johnny looking the same as he had in college.

Johnny, barely pausing in what he was saying, put a huge, careless arm around Bink's thin shoulders and drew him into the circle. When Mrs. Farnsworth placed a small glass of sherry in Bink's hand, Johnny Sewell threw back his head and gave his laugh. "That's right," he said, almost choking. "There's only a few of us left. Am I right, son? Only a few of us left! What did you say the boy's name was, Russ?"

"We call him Bink," Russ Bowers began.

"Going to play football, son? Better get a little meat on your bones and go slow on that drink." He thumped Bink

on the back so hard that the sherry nearly spilled. Then he looked down at the boy and winked, shutting out the other people for an instant.

Standing there, taking cautious drinks of his sherry, aware of Johnny Sewell's arm around his shoulders, Bink felt a maturity he had never known before. Talk flowed around him—not the kind of talk he heard at home when his father had men he knew downtown for dinner, but loud, exciting talk about someone who heaved a brick through a plate-glass window and the time they got a little bootlegger named Rosanno tight on his own liquor.

Every now and then Johnny Sewell would look down at Bink and say, "Don't believe a word of this, son. We're making it up."

But Bink was hardly listening. He was thinking that Johnny Sewell had been All-American for two years and that even the coach of his school still spoke of him as the greatest forward-passer of all time. He began to notice the other men, men his father talked about as though they were boys, and found with something like disgust that they looked old. As old as his father. He saw them coldly and impersonally; Nick Farnsworth was getting bald, Poo-poo Thompson was fat, Hank Holbrook and Don Gates tried to act too young. He saw his own father clearly for the first time in his life as a pleasant-faced, plump little man who wore glasses. He glanced up at Johnny Sewell and felt reassured. He was young, as young as Bink had imagined he would be. He even dressed young and wore a rough tweed suit with a soft shirt and a bright foulard tie. And there was something about the way he tossed down his drinks that showed a fine disregard for the future. Bink saw that his

father was still holding onto his second highball, and with an air of defiance he took quite a large sip of his sherry.

The movement attracted Johnny Sewell's attention and he looked down at Bink. "How you coming, son?" he asked. "Everything all right?" He finished his drink and his hand rested heavier on Bink's shoulder.

"I've seen a lot of kids in my day," he said. "A lot of kids. They used to wait outside the dressing rooms in droves. I wish I had a dollar for every program I've autographed. Thousands of them. I used to write 'Good Luck' and sign my name. Sometimes I'd write the kid's name, too, if there weren't too many of them waiting. Made it more personal. Gave them something to remember. But I guess it's too late for an autograph now. Isn't that right, son? And no programs, either. Nothing to sign but checks."

All the men, happy and amused, looked down at Bink, and he struggled to speak. "I was going to ask you for one," he said. "Later."

"Well, now." Johnny Sewell's voice sounded pleased. "You were going to ask me for one, were you? You want an autograph from an old-timer like me?"

Everyone in the room was suddenly interested. Even the women stopped talking and glanced over at Bink, smiling sympathetically. It seemed to him that they looked as though there was something slightly humorous in asking for Johnny Sewell's autograph now. It made him mad and with his anger he became articulate.

"Old-timer!" he scoffed. "Old-timer, nothing! Just the greatest forward-passer of all time!"

"Well, hooray for Bink!" Nick Farnsworth exclaimed. He fished in his pocket and drew out an envelope, which he

handed to Johnny. "Go to it, Johnny, if you haven't forgotten how!"

Johnny Sewell put down his glass and took his pen from his vest pocket. "What did you say your name was, son?" he asked.

"Bink."

The pen looked small in Johnny's huge hand and he grasped it like a man to whom a pen would always be an annoying, necessary object. His writing was large and childish. "To my pal, Bink," he wrote, "from his friend Johnny Sewell."

He picked up his glass and, seeing that it was empty, walked across the room to refill it. Passing the group of women, he singled one out. "Oh, Bess," he said. "I want you to meet Russ Bowers' boy. He's a great kid. Come over here, son, and meet Mrs. Sewell."

Bink, clutching the envelope and his glass of sherry, made his way to them. By Johnny Sewell's side a woman stood. Not a young woman and not a pretty woman. Her hair was quite gray and had an untidy look. Bink, remembering how his mother looked, saw that there was something wrong in the way this woman was dressed.

"Be back in a minute," Johnny Sewell said. "You two get acquainted."

Mrs. Sewell sat down on the couch and moved over to make room for Bink. "So you're the boy who wanted Johnny's autograph," she said. "That was sweet of you. Just like old times."

She sat looking at him and smiling. She had not removed her coat and her face looked warm and shiny. In one hand she clutched a pair of fabric gloves and Bink saw that her

coat wasn't a very good one. He looked down again at her hand and noticed that she had no red on her nails and that the diamond in her ring was very small.

In a flash of discernment it came to him that Johnny Sewell was poor, and he looked up again at her, so frightened at the injustice of the world that he was unable to speak.

No News Is Good

A FEW minutes before six-thirty, Miss Harriet Clarke moved the radio from the pine table that stood between the kitchen windows and set it on the cherry gate-legged table. Then she lit the candles while her sister, Mrs. Brainerd, filled the water glasses. The kitchen was L-shaped, and some years ago the two ladies had decided that it was foolish to eat in the dining room when the smaller part of the L could so easily be furnished as a cozy little dining alcove. Although they referred to it as the breakfast nook, they ate all their meals there. It was pleasant in the winter, when the windows grew blurred with steam and the room smelled of coffee boiling or fresh rolls baking. It was even nicer in the summer, when the scents of the Vermont countryside blew in through the open window and mingled with the appetizing odor of their delicate dinners. Promptly at half past six every evening, Miss Clarke turned the switch on the radio and adjusted the dial for the news broadcast. It was her job, just as it was Mrs. Brainerd's job to carve the meat in paper-thin slices and serve the vegetables. Mrs. Brainerd's few years of married life had equipped her for the more masculine share of the household chores.

The evening was warm and there was a hint of rain in the air. Miss Clarke frowned as she tuned in on a New York station. "I'm afraid we'll have some static," she said.

Mrs. Brainerd counted out six stalks of asparagus and laid them neatly on a blue willowware plate. "There's plenty more of this," she said. "I always think it looks so unappetizing to see too much food in front of one at once. Better to come back, I think." She carried two plates to the table and set them down.

"There is static," Miss Clarke said. "I suppose it can't be helped. Some bright young man would be doing a great service if he would invent a way to do away with it." She sat down and unfolded her napkin.

The radio hummed and crackled, and the announcer's voice cut through the room.

Mrs. Brainerd took a sip of water. "I always think that young man's voice is just exactly like Paul Phillips's. You remember Paul Phillips, Harriet? He lived in the corner house near the Delmar Avenue trolley."

"I should say I do remember him." Miss Clarke laughed softly. "I never will forget the sensation he caused when he made the parlor curtains for his mother."

"He didn't make them, exactly, dear. He designed them."

"Well, it's the same thing." Miss Clarke turned an attentive ear to the radio. The news broadcast had begun.

"He was a quiet sort of boy. His mother worshipped the ground he walked on. I always thought that *that's* what made him such a sissy. I mean, she kept him in curls until he was ten."

"Goodness!" Miss Clarke exclaimed. "I wonder how those men keep the names of all those foreign towns straight."

Mrs. Brainerd buttered a hot roll. "When she died, he married, you know. It was a great surprise. He was getting on. He must have been over forty. What *was* the name of

the girl he married? Hazzard, or Cummings, or something like that."

"Hazzard was the name of the girl Luther Childs married. Marion Hazzard. She was from Ohio."

"Illinois," Mrs. Brainerd corrected her. "He met her at that place they used to go on Lake Michigan. It had an Indian name. Minne-something."

"She was a lovely-looking girl," Miss Clarke said. "She looked just like that actress we saw in the picture about the detective. You know, she was the detective's wife."

"I don't think I remember it."

"Oh, you must remember it!" Miss Clarke's voice was impatient. "Her husband was a detective. He's the man who is almost always a detective. I can't quite think whether he is a professional one or not, but he solves the murders. The tall man with the mustache. He has very nice shoulders, too."

"Ronald Colman?" Mrs. Brainerd suggested.

"Goodness, no! Not Ronald Colman. He doesn't look anything like Ronald Colman. He's stouter. Well, not stout, but there's more to him, and he has a mustache."

"Ronald Colman has a mustache."

"Well, it's not Ronald Colman. This man isn't even English. He's an American, and you've seen him dozens of times."

"I can't think," Mrs Brainerd said. "Would you like a little more asparagus, Harriet?"

Miss Clarke passed her plate absent-mindedly. "Now, isn't that aggravating! His name's on the tip of my tongue."

"Don't think about it," Mrs. Brainerd said soothingly. "It will come to you."

She walked to the stove and counted out six more stalks of asparagus and divided a new potato in half. "I only cooked three potatoes," she said. "If I cook two apiece, there's always one left, and there isn't anything you can do with one potato."

"I wish we had that recipe for fish cakes that Mrs. Harris used to make. I believe she used to make them with potato."

"Those were mashed potatoes." Mrs. Brainerd carried the plates back to the table and sat down again. "Goodness, what was that?" she asked. "Something about a transport."

"It was something about a transport," Miss Clarke agreed. "But I didn't quite catch it. It's all too dreadful."

"Dreadful," Mrs. Brainerd repeated. "There's your friend the announcer again."

"My *friend* the announcer," Miss Clarke said gaily. "*Your* friend Paul Phillips."

"It would be strange if he were Paul Phillips."

"It would be. But Paul Phillips—why, Paul Phillips must be in his sixties."

The two sisters looked at one another in amazement.

"How the years do fly," Mrs. Brainerd said. She looked toward the window. The dotted-swiss curtains fluttered in the breeze, and the red geranium on the window sill was brilliant in the gray half-light. Her mouth drooped at the corners and her eyes were softly puzzled.

"Almost time for Lowell Thomas, dear," she said.

Lucky Girl

WHEN Janet Price told her friend Mrs. Carroll that she didn't see how she could bear living in a hotel another week, Mrs. Carroll said she knew just the thing. "Mary Shaw and Peggy Stover want someone to share their apartment with them," she said. "Mary mentioned it to me the other day. They're perfectly lovely girls, and they have a perfectly sweet place. I'll have you all to tea so that you can talk it over."

"Do they really want someone?" Janet Price asked. "I mean I wouldn't want to butt in."

"Oh, they *really* do," Mrs. Carroll said. "They've been living together since last October, and while I don't think the rent is exactly too *much* for them, I do think that they feel if they had a *third* person, things would be a little easier."

"How much do they pay?" Janet Price asked.

"Eighty dollars," Mrs. Carroll said. "And that makes forty dollars apiece, not counting gas, electricity, and telephone. So you see, a third person would help."

"It would be wonderful for me, too," Janet Price said. "Why, it would be only twenty-six something."

Mrs. Carroll went right to the telephone and called Mary Shaw. Mary was sure to be home, she explained, because she painted miniatures and usually worked all

afternoon. It was arranged that Peggy, Mary, and Janet would come to tea the following Saturday at Mrs. Carroll's, and if everything went well, Janet could go home with the other two girls and see their apartment.

On Saturday, when Janet Price arrived at the Carrolls', Mrs. Carroll led the way to her bedroom. "Peggy couldn't come," she said. "She has a very attentive beau, and at the last moment something came up and she couldn't come. But Mary's here, and dying to meet you. Mary's really the sweeter of the two. Peggy's more vivacious, but Mary's sweeter, if you know what I mean."

Janet took off her coat and hat and laid them on the bed. She fluffed her hair out at the sides and rather nervously followed Mrs. Carroll to the living room.

"Well, here she is!" Mrs. Carroll said brightly. "Here's the lucky girl! Janet, this is Mary Shaw. And Mary, this is Janet Price." She beamed at them proudly.

Mary Shaw got up from the sofa and clasped Janet's hand firmly. She was a tall, square-looking girl with a broad, high forehead and fine, strong teeth. She wore a gray suit, a neat white blouse, and stockings that were a shade too dark. She smelled faintly of oil paints. "I'm not going to start off by apologizing for Peggy," she said. "Because if we're going to be friends, and I'm sure I certainly hope we will, you're going to have to get used to Peggy. She'll *say* she'll do something with the best intentions in the world, and then suddenly she'll decide not to."

"Dear Peggy," Mrs. Carroll said. "She's such a lamb."

"Oh, absolutely," Mary agreed. "I just love her to death. And we get along like—well, like two peas in a pod. I just humor her. We all have our little ways, you know."

"Mary's wonderful with people," Mrs. Carroll said. "Now, don't deny it, Mary, because you really are wonderful."

"Well," Mary said, "if I *am*, and I'm not admitting it, it's probably because of my work."

"Mary does miniatures on ivory," Mrs. Carroll explained. "She really has to study human nature."

"It must be frightfully fascinating," Janet said. She sat down on the sofa and smoothed her skirt.

Mary sat down beside her and turned so that she faced her. "Lately I've been doing a lot of dogs," she said. "And would you believe it, they have just as interesting personalities as people?"

Mrs. Carroll laughed. "Well, you know the old saying—the more I see of people, the better I like dogs," she said. "But now I'm going to run out to the kitchen and get us some tea and leave you two girls alone to have a nice talk." She patted Janet on the shoulder and left the room.

"I think she's such a lovely person," Mary said. "I always say that she and Frank are the only really happily married people I know. Now then, tell me all about *yourself* and I'll tell you all about *myself*."

Janet leaned forward and took a cigarette from a leather box that stood on the coffee table. "There isn't much to tell," she said. "I came to New York because I thought I might as well have a *fling* at it, and I've been living at the Barbizon. I thought I simply couldn't stand living in a hotel another minute, and I guess you know the rest."

Mary looked at her sharply. "I suppose you have a perfectly wonderful job or something?"

"Well, no, I haven't," Janet said. "I'm taking a course at

Katharine Gibbs'. My family are paying for it. They send me an allowance, too, of course."

Mary smiled. "I sound pretty businesslike asking you such a question, don't I? But I think we might as well put our cards on the table, don't you?"

"It's the best thing to do," Janet said.

"Well, we might as well get the money end over with," Mary said. "The apartment is eighty a month, and Peggy and I have been paying forty each. Then we share the food, telephone, gas, electricity, and laundry. That is, we used to share the telephone, but then we decided it would be fairer to put down our calls, because lots of times I would call more than Peggy or Peggy would call more than I. Or there would be telegrams or something. We have a pad right on the telephone table and it's no trouble, really. It's *fairer*."

"Oh, that would be all right," Janet said.

"And we sort of do the laundry the same way," Mary went on. "I mean if you wanted to put in your silk things, why naturally that would make a difference. What we do is share on linen and pay for our own things. It works out that way for food, too. There are some things we both use, like coffee. But I mean, for instance, if you suddenly decided you wanted a honeydew melon for breakfast, why then it would be up to you to pay for it. You'd be surprised how easy it is to remember what things in the refrigerator are yours and what things aren't."

"I didn't ask Mrs. Carroll about *room*," Janet said. "I wouldn't want to crowd you."

"Oh, we've loads of room," Mary said. "Simply loads. We have two enormous rooms, a *real* kitchen, a bath, and

four closets. There are twin beds in the bedroom and a day bed in the living room. You could take your choice, of course, but the way we work it out, the one who is out the latest sleeps in the living room, so as not to disturb the other. Peggy is out loads. I suppose Mrs. Carroll told you about Alex. So Peggy usually sleeps in the living room. The day bed is terribly comfortable. As a matter of fact, I *prefer* it."

"And the closet space, and bureau drawers, and things like that?" Janet asked.

"Oh, that can all be arranged," Mary said. "Most of the furniture is mine, but you mustn't even think about that. I just happened to have it, and I'm only too glad to share it."

"That's very sweet of you," Janet said.

"Oh, it's nothing." Mary leaned forward and spoke earnestly. "What is important—at least *I* think it is—is for people to get along together. Of course, everyone, I don't care who, has a little temperament. I know Peggy has, and I suppose I have. Well, I think that all such little differences in temperament can be ironed out by simply talking them over. I mean I would rather have you come to me and tell me frankly that you didn't like this, that, or the other thing than to hold it in. And I would have absolutely no compunction about doing the same thing to you. After all, I always say that there is no reason why intelligent people should ever *quarrel*."

Janet was silent. She could hear Mrs. Carroll moving about the kitchen and she could smell the bread toasting in the oven.

"Well?" Mary asked. "What do you think?" Her voice was urgent and inquiring.

"I suppose I should think it over before I decide," Janet said doubtfully.

"Oh, naturally, you'll want to see the apartment," Mary said. "Although it is sweet, if I do say so myself. But providing you like the place, and I'm sure you will, what do you think?"

Janet looked down at the floor. "It sounds very attractive," she began.

"Oh, it *is*!" Mary cried. "There are always loads of people coming in and out, and I have a most attractive brother I want you to meet. And you'll love Peggy. Although I'm going to tell you a little secret. I don't think we'll have Peggy with us very long. She and Alex, you know."

"Oh," Janet said.

"But that won't make too much difference, because I know a perfectly lovely girl in Boston who wants to come to New York to live, and I'm positive we can get her."

The tone of her voice made Janet feel as though she had been taken into a conspiracy. It was an unpleasant feeling, and she wanted to protest against it. Before she could speak, Mrs. Carroll came back into the room, carrying a tea tray.

"We're practically all set!" Mary Shaw cried gaily.

Mrs. Carroll looked at them benevolently. "I *am* glad," she said. "Now, when we've had our tea, I'll walk over to the apartment with you. After all, I think it's up to me to deliver Janet to the door."

As she set the tea tray down on the table in front of the couch, she laughed at her little joke.

Never to Return

THE house in Connecticut was white and the shutters were painted turquoise blue. A branch of the syringa bush had been allowed to grow across the front door. Mrs. Evelyn Platt liked reaching up to push it aside, when the branch sagged with heavy-scented white blossoms, so that drops of dew fell on her arms and hair. She remembered what a poor, sickly thing the bush had been ten years ago, and she couldn't bear cutting off an inch of it, even if eventually she would have to give up entering the house by the front door. Both Mrs. Platt and Edith Treadway, who lived with her, hated to hurt growing or living things. Shortly after Mrs. Platt bought the house they gave up eating meat, except for a bit of chicken now and then, which they bought, boned and jellied, in a can. Without the bones staring them in the face, it was easier to convince themselves that what they swallowed was something turned out in a factory, like rayon.

The inside of the house teemed with life. Plants grew in pots on the window sills and in hanging baskets on the living-room walls; a bowl of goldfish on the table between the windows was protected from the two Persian cats, Nur Mahal and Shalimar, by some wire netting; Blue Boy, a fat and brooding spaniel, dedicated his life to keeping underfoot.

Both Mrs. Platt and Miss Treadway knew that they would never die. They would simply pass on to another life, which would be, if possible, more beautiful and joyous than the one in which they were now living. They had lived before, they said, and there was no reason to doubt that they would live again. Mrs. Platt, when urged, could remember some high spots of her past; there was the time in Egypt, for instance, when she was a princess who had taken refuge in the tomb of her forefathers during some sort of uprising. She could give a graphic description of the tomb and tell how frightened she had been when the mob beat on the doors. Fortunately, at that point an earthquake had come along and she had been hurried to safety through a secret passageway by a handsome slave of royal blood. When she met Mr. Platt she thought he was the reincarnation of the slave, but the years had proved that she was mistaken, and when he died she sighed and told Miss Treadway that she was afraid Mr. Platt in *his* next life would have to start at the beginning. "In some lower form," she said. "Not as a human but as a higher animal, perhaps, to atone for the mistakes he made in this life."

The summer after Mr. Platt died, Edith Treadway came from New York to stay a few months with his widow in the new house that she had bought with the insurance money. When winter came, Miss Treadway stayed on. She and Mrs. Platt continued to live in harmony for ten years. Occasionally, men had come to the house as suitors. The ones who came to see Mrs. Platt always had a look of the handsome slave about them at first. They never kept this look more than a month, and Mrs. Platt remained a widow. At first she had felt a little lost without a man around the house, but her plants, her dog, her two cats, and

the goldfish soon filled the small gap Mr. Platt had left. Besides, Miss Treadway was such a comfort. She designed jewelry, and Mrs. Platt had remodelled the old chicken coop into a small workshop where Miss Treadway beat on strips of silver until they turned into bracelets or rings. Her jewelry had a decided Indian look to it, both Eastern and American. Mrs. Platt, after a little probing, learned that Miss Treadway remembered both living in a harem and carrying a bow and arrow.

Sometimes they had a few people in for dinner, but mostly they sat at the maple trestle table in the dining alcove and ate their simple meals alone. They looked with loving eyes on the begonia that graced the center of the table. "I gave it a teaspoonful of Vigoro," Mrs. Platt would say. And Miss Treadway would agree that Vigoro worked wonders. They nibbled at their raw carrots, cut thin and curled in ice water, drank their tomato juice, ate their vegetable plates. After dinner, in winter they sat by the fire in the living room and in summer wandered about the garden. When it grew dark, they read aloud to one another until bedtime; they read books on flower arrangement, numerology, astrology, breathing, eating, and on the right way to think. They spoke of people they liked as "rare souls," and honestly expected to be palling around with them a thousand years from now. They never used the word "death" or "die." Their friends "passed on," "passed over," were "lost," or "left us," but they never died.

One spring, Mrs. Platt and Miss Treadway decided to take a trip to New York for a month, visit the museums, see some plays, and shop. Mrs. Kinney, who came to clean every day, agreed to stay in the house and look after the animals and plants. The first night they were in New York,

Miss Treadway complained of a headache. She felt her head and decided she had a slight fever. In the three days that followed, the fever mounted and raged. They were three days of horror for Mrs. Platt, and a week later she returned to the house in Connecticut alone.

As she entered the front door, she reached up mechanically and lifted the syringa branch aside. It was in full leaf. Sunlight came through the windows of the living room, and the leaves of the plants shone like emeralds. Nur Mahal and Shalimar, the two cats, purred and rubbed their warm bodies against her skirt. Blue Boy, the spaniel, got up from his pillow in the sun and greeted her sleepily. Mrs. Platt could hear Mrs. Kinney moving about the kitchen.

Mrs. Platt closed the door softly and stood looking about the room. "Mrs. Kinney!" she called.

Mrs. Kinney appeared in the doorway that led to the pantry. Her face was white and stricken and she struggled for speech. "Mrs. Platt," she said. "I didn't hear you come in. I got your wire with the news, the news that dear Miss Treadway had passed on."

Mrs. Platt looked straight into Mrs. Kinney's eyes. "Yes," she said. "She's dead. Edith is dead." She drew her skirt away from the cats and walked slowly over to the sofa. She sat down heavily on the soft cushions, her shoulders drooping.

Mrs. Kinney searched for words to comfort her. "She's in a happier world," she said. "You must remember that."

Once more Mrs. Platt looked at her strangely. "She died very suddenly," she said.

Men Really Rule the World

KATHERINE FOSTER drove all the way to town from Scarsdale to meet Dorothy Craig when she arrived from the Coast. Dorothy Craig hadn't been in New York for almost five years, and the two women were dying to see each other. They had been writing letters back and forth saying that they were just dying ever since Dorothy had planned the trip, almost two months ago. And when her train got to Chicago, Dorothy wired, "CAN'T WAIT. DYING TO SEE YOU," and Katherine had wired an immediate answer to Dorothy aboard the Twentieth Century: "CAN'T WAIT EITHER. DYING TO SEE YOU."

As Dorothy walked up the ramp at Grand Central, Katherine stood behind the ropes, nodding and smiling and making faces, before she rushed around and embraced her. "I never thought you'd *meet* me!" Dorothy said. "I had no idea. I was going to call you up and then take the very first train to Scarsdale."

"Well," Katherine said, "I must admit I *thought* it over. I only have an A card, but of course the man at the place where I get my gas knows me." She looked at Dorothy significantly. "*You* know."

Dorothy laughed. "Oh, I know, all right," she said. "I know *you*. I'm not surprised at all that *you* can get gas when you need it."

"I suppose it isn't the thing to do," Katherine said. "But it's all so silly. I'm sure there's plenty of gas. They just haven't got a way to get it here. Anyhow, it's really the rubber."

"Of course it's the rubber," Dorothy said with assurance.

She looked around quickly. "Heavens!" she said. "I've forgotten my bags! A porter has them on one of those little things you wheel. You just can't get a porter all to yourself. I suppose he's taken them out to the taxi place. They usually do if you don't say anything."

"We'll look for him," Katherine said. They started toward the taxi stand arm in arm. They were pretty, well-dressed women and their heels clicked briskly on the hard floor. They wore open-toed shoes, and although it was very warm, they carried silver-fox furs.

The porter was standing in the dim taxi stand. Rows of yellow taxis waited in line and then whizzed by with their passengers. The place smelled of fumes from their exhausts.

"Awful?" Katherine asked.

"Awful," Dorothy agreed. She turned to the porter. "That little striped one's mine," she said. "And the big one with the cover, and the patent-leather hatbox." She counted out thirty cents and handed the money to him.

"I think, as long as they've been silly enough to put in the new system, people might as well give them ten cents a bag and no more," she said to Katherine. "Goodness knows, I never used to *dream* of giving so little. I always gave fifty cents, at least."

"It's their own fault," Katherine said. "I suppose we'll have to carry them the rest of the way ourselves."

They stooped and picked up the bags, Dorothy taking

the heaviest and Katherine carrying the hatbox and the small one.

"I had a terrible time parking," Katherine said. "Wouldn't you think that the traffic would let up a little, considering everything?"

"You would, wouldn't you?" Dorothy said.

They were hot when they finally reached Katherine's convertible coupé, which she had parked on Forty-fourth Street, near Lexington. And as they started uptown, they both sighed with relief. "Now," Dorothy said, "tell me all about Isobel."

"She's wonderful," Katherine said. "Just exactly the same. She's dying to see you, so I thought we'd run over there tonight after dinner."

"Wonderful!" Dorothy exclaimed.

"I see a lot of her," Katherine said. "An awful lot. We both are in the same first-aid course and we were both Minute Women!" She laughed gaily. "That was fun!"

"And Jack?" Dorothy asked. "How's he?"

Katherine was silent for a minute. "Well," she said, "I suppose I shouldn't really *say* it, but Jack's awful. Isobel still sticks to him, heaven knows why. He's gotten *much* worse."

"He was pretty bad when I was here last," Dorothy said. "I mean he didn't make sense. Not that he talked much, but what he did say just didn't make sense."

"I think it's affected his brain," Katherine said. "Really affected it. I don't see how Isobel stands it. After all, he brought it on himself with all that drinking, and now he's completely shot."

"Does he—"

"Oh, not now," Katherine said. "He can't touch a thing. He'd drop dead if he did. He can't breathe as it is. His asthma's dreadful, and it's a miracle he hangs on."

Dorothy reached up and tucked back a lock of hair that had blown out from under her hat. "It would be a blessing if he just *went*," she said. "I should think Isobel would just turn him loose and let him have all the drinks he wants."

Katherine put on the brakes of the car and stopped for a red light. "I should think she would, too," she said. "Although I suppose it would be really *murder*. Anyway, he doesn't seem to want a drink. We sit there and have a few drinks when he's around, and he never says anything. He just gets a glass of milk or something. He doesn't seem to mind at all."

"Does he do anything?" Dorothy asked. "Anything at all?"

"Absolutely nothing," Katherine said. "That's what makes it so ghastly. He just putters around. Isobel's almost pathetic, the way she tries to keep out of his way. She simply doesn't take any interest in anything at *home* at all."

"I shouldn't think she would."

Katherine shrugged her shoulders. "Why should she?" she asked. "Anyway, you won't have to bother about him. I swear to heaven I don't think Isobel's heard a word he's said for years. She just doesn't *listen*."

"It's the only way," Dorothy Craig said. "Just the same, I'm dying to see *her*."

Dorothy went with Katherine to her first-aid class that afternoon, and they got back to the house late for dinner. Katherine's house was cool, pretty, and feminine. She had had it completely done over after her husband died ten

years ago, and little by little she had bought small extra things until it seemed to her that now it was almost perfect.

The two women talked and smoked with their coffee, and it was dark when they started for Isobel Russell's house. They had changed into dinner dresses of printed silk and they wore their silver-fox scarves around their shoulders. Katherine Foster handled her small car deftly. Dorothy opened the window on her side and breathed in the night air. "It's really lovely out here," she said. "It smells so good —like the country, really."

"I know," Katherine said. "And yet I'm really near everything. I think it's ideal."

"Is Isobel's house nice?" Dorothy asked.

"Yes, it's nice," Katherine said. "It isn't as nice as it could be, but it's nice. She has some nice things."

"Does Jack play any more?" Dorothy asked.

"Play!" Katherine's voice was scornful. "The way he shakes!"

"He played well," Dorothy said.

"That was years ago." Katherine turned the wheel of the car and drove into a short driveway lined with rhododendron. There was a light at the front door of the house. The air smelled of newly cut grass.

The two women stepped out onto a gravelled pathway and started toward the house, setting their feet down carefully in their high-heeled evening slippers. Before they could ring the bell the door opened and Isobel Russell stood in the doorway. She, too, wore a printed evening dress and her blonde hair was piled high on her head. The lights of the living room were soft and pink in back of her.

"Darling!" she cried. She bent her head toward Dorothy's

lips, then turned it quickly, remembering her lipstick, so that her kiss fell in the air near Dorothy's hair.

"I can't believe it!" Dorothy said. "It's so marvellous to see you again!"

Katherine reached for Isobel's hand and squeezed it affectionately. "Where *were* you this afternoon, you bad thing?" she asked. "Lucky we had Dorothy to fill in."

Isobel brushed them into the living room. "Sh-h-h," she whispered. "Couldn't leave him." She raised her voice to a cheerful tone slightly above normal. "Jack," she said, "here they are! Here's Dorothy! *You* remember Dorothy!"

In the dimmest corner of the room, at the far end of the grand piano, Jack Russell sat. He sat in a large upholstered chair listening to the radio, which was turned on softly.

"Yes," he said. As he started to rise from his chair, Dorothy hurried toward him.

"Stay where you are," she said. She bent and kissed him lightly on the hair, giving him a quick, enveloping glance.

His skin looked thick and blotched, and underneath the blotches it was a gray, dead color. He wore an old tweed suit and his tie was a bright foulard. His hands looked rough and dry, but his eyes were an intense and wonderful blue.

"Well," Dorothy said.

"Now," Isobel said, "let's sit over here on the couch, and Jack can listen to his program, and we won't disturb him at all."

The women fluttered toward the couch. Isobel lowered her voice again. "He loves his programs," she said. "He waits for them." Katherine and Dorothy nodded sympathetically.

"Well," Isobel said brightly, "tell us what it's like on the Coast. Katherine and I have been *wrecks* ever since we heard you were coming. Do you like it there or do you hate it?"

"I don't *mind* it," Dorothy Craig said. "I wouldn't say I liked it, exactly. It isn't too bad."

Jack Russell turned the dial of the radio and it blared out suddenly as he got another station. "Jack!" Isobel said. She whispered again. "He *fools* with it all evening. He's got *two*. One here and one in his room, so I don't really see why, when he knows we want to talk—"

"It doesn't bother us at all," Katherine said.

Isobel smiled at them. "Tell us everything," she said to Dorothy. "How's George?"

"Oh, George is just fine," Dorothy said. "He's as *busy!* I said to him the other day, I said, 'Honestly, George, I never even *see* you any more. Talk about your war widows!' "

The two other women laughed appreciatively. "What does he do, *exactly?*" Isobel asked.

Dorothy Craig frowned. "Well," she said, "he really works like a dog. He's on all these committees, and you know what *they* are! And then there's all that fuss about oil, and I think he sort of worries about that. He *feels* it awfully, and he never stops."

"Of course," Katherine said, "it's perfectly awful about the war, and I do think that none of us has to be told about that, but it was lucky for George. I mean oil's so important and it's right up his alley."

"Oh, in *that* way," Dorothy said, "it couldn't have been better. Not that we think of it *that* way. After all, by this

time next year I suppose we'll all be in the same boat, no matter what." She lifted her head and smiled courageously.

A siren blew in the distance, but the women did not notice. The radio stopped playing suddenly, and the three women looked up. "Why, Jack," Isobel said, "how thoughtful!"

Suddenly the siren sounded again outside, and Jack Russell got up from his chair. "Air raid," he said. "Put out those lights."

Isobel laughed lightly. "It isn't really an air raid," she said. "It's just a blackout or something."

"Put out the lights," he said.

Isobel sighed and reached for the light that stood on a table at the end of the couch. She turned it off. "Now, leave the others alone," she said, "until I get candles." She got up and went to the piano and took a seven-branched candlestick from it. She struck a match and lit the candles.

"I wonder how long it will be," Katherine said.

"About twenty minutes," Dorothy said. "They always are about twenty minutes. Goodness, at home we were *driving* when one came, and there we had to sit. Right where we were, in the dark. I almost went to sleep."

Jack Russell walked around the living room turning out the rest of the lights. He breathed heavily as he walked and his hand shook as he fumbled with the switches. Isobel set the candlestick on the table. "Take that off the table," he said. "Put it on the floor." He went to the windows and drew down the shades. Then he pulled the draperies across them. They didn't quite meet, and he turned to Isobel. "Get some pins," he said, "or blow out those damned candles."

"The pins," Isobel said, "are in my room. In my top dressing-table drawer."

Jack Russell walked out of the room, and the three women could hear him puffing as he mounted the stairs.

"He's so silly," Isobel said. "They're just practicing. I don't know why he acts so silly."

Katherine Foster lit a cigarette. "Men get so excited," she said.

Outside it was very dark, and suddenly someone pounded at the door. "Turn out those lights!" a boy's voice called.

Jack Russell hurried down the stairs and opened the front door. "Have them right out," he said. He went over to the window and pinned the draperies tightly together. The window was wide and ran across the front of the house. He went back to the door. "God!" he said. "Haven't you got a shade here?"

"We've never had a shade there," Isobel said.

He picked up the evening paper, which lay on a chair near the door, and held it up so that it covered the small window. Taking some pins from his pocket, he tried to pin the paper to the glass curtains. The paper sagged. He opened the door and stepped outside, closing it after him.

"Well!" Dorothy said. "Where's he gone, do you suppose?"

"Oh," Isobel said wearily, "he's probably just looking to see if any *light* shows!"

They could hear the boy's voice again and Jack answering him. He came back into the room again. "No good," he said. "The light shows." He took the candlestick, carried it to the piano, and set it down underneath. Then he went outdoors again.

Dorothy laughed. "Well, if this goes on, we'll have to spend the night," she said.

"Yes," Katherine said to Isobel. "I can have your room, and Dorothy can have the guest room, and you'll have to sleep with Jack!"

"Katie, you're awful," Dorothy said. "Of course, we are used to the best," she went on archly, "and we both want breakfast in bed. What do you like, Katie?"

"Oh," Katherine said, "I eat a big breakfast. I like a real English breakfast. Eggs, kidneys, and all that."

Isobel laughed. "Orange juice and coffee and toast is what you'll get," she said. "And I can think of nothing worse than having you stay."

The door opened and Jack came in. "The Townsends next door are out and all their lights were on," he said. "Hoisted the Miller boy through the window and we've got 'em all out now."

He stooped heavily and picked up the candlestick.

"Jack!" Isobel said sharply. "What are you doing?"

He turned and faced her. "What am I doing?" he shouted. "Why, you damned silly fool, I'm blowing these candles out!"

Isobel's face was pale. "We're *not* going to sit here in the dark," she said.

He blew out the candles one by one. "Yes, you are!" he shouted. "Yes, you are! You damned silly fools!"

The women sat still in the dark, and Katherine leaned forward and put out her cigarette. They could hear him gasping for breath as he walked toward the window. "You can talk if you want to," he said.

The women couldn't think of anything to say.

Counter-Irritant

WHEN Don Gibson got married, it came as a complete surprise to his friends. He was not, they said, the marrying sort. Indeed, it was hard to decide what sort he was and all his life he had baffled people who tried to figure him out. He was small and very thin, and he lived in a constant state of irritation. Practically everything annoyed him: women's hats, waiters, the temperature of rooms (which were either stifling or like barns), telephones, the President, people in elevators who out of sheer perversity would not face the doors, entire theatre audiences, laundries, cleaning women, the weather, contraltos, ashtrays, and the way the world was run. When he was not being violently and noisily angry, he was smoldering, and it was as much as a person's life was worth to have dinner with him in a restaurant. The table he preferred was always occupied by a couple who had seated themselves there just to be disagreeable, and when he had finally chosen a second best, he would straighten the silverware, usually wiping it off suspiciously on his napkin. Then, it seemed, while waiters were willing and even anxious to serve others, they studiously avoided him and his desires, so that it was necessary for him to say something biting and sarcastic to attract the attention of one of them. "I would like to order *today*," he would say, "*if* it's all the same to you."

When his order came and he took a mouthful of his crabmeat cocktail, for instance, there was a horrible moment as he bit down hard on a piece of shell. He was a magnet for foreign substances in food, and while he never went so far as to send his order back, he ate the rest of it warily, turning it over cagily with his fork, on the alert for more shells, bits of broken glass, or worse. If he and the person with whom he was dining asked for roast chicken, it was he who got all the dark meat and the smaller potato. It was as though Fate had nothing to do but play on his jangled nerves by surrounding him with pitfalls.

Beyond all other things, women seemed to push him to the limit of endurance. They drove him as near to insanity as a man can get without actually beating his head against a wall and screaming. And he stared at them with such a mad look in his eyes that they became nervous, and let bags and gloves slide from their laps and couldn't make up their minds about anything. It was horrible to see him cornering a flustered woman, demanding "All right, do you want to go or don't you?" Or to see him in a group composed mostly of women, muttering "Blah, blah, blah" to himself. He became fiercely angry at the pretty ones who listened to him and tried to look intelligent and engrossed. He let them make fools of themselves by wearing their prettiest, most rapt expressions while he talked, and then he turned on them. "But you don't know what I'm talking about!" he would shout. "Why do you sit there pretending to care what I'm saying when you don't understand a word of it?"

They would protest that, on the contrary, the things he had told them were fascinating and that he made it all so

clear. But he snorted with contempt, and even as he went on talking, it was as though the life had been taken right out of him.

He had a different technique with the intellectual ones. He listened to them as one listens to a second-grader, with an amused tolerance, closing his eyes and smiling in a rather sick manner, occasionally staring at the victim's hat, which even she was aware was on the utilitarian side.

Yet for all his contempt of women, he spent a great deal of time with them, and they seemed fascinated by him. It was as though they hoped that underneath the rudeness and scorn a rich vein of pure gold lay hidden, and if they dug long enough and hard enough they could reach it. The men who knew him apparently felt the same way. They had a sneaking admiration for his search for perfection, and apologized for him. "Don's not a bad guy when you get to know him," they said. This may have been true, only there was not a soul in the world who really knew him.

His admirers took his constant small furies as a sign of vitality, and it was a matter of pride to them that he was a handful at a party. He would sit in a corner brooding over his drink, wincing at the things that were said and the topics that were discussed, until everyone felt that if they could only get Don to appear to be having a good time, the evening would be made. He never left a gathering in one of his rages, but stayed, slightly drunk, magnificently belligerent, ready to take offense at almost anything. He could hear a whisper across the room and he would bounce from his chair, drink in hand, shouting "How can you make a statement like that? How can you?" Then he would stride up and down, pointing out to all the utter stupidity of such a

contention. His tirades were full of negatives and surprisingly barren of positives.

Occasionally he would carry the banner for something or some person, usually of no particular consequence, so that he never ran up against any great opposition. "God!" he would exclaim. "I've just seen a great picture, 'Path to the Moon.' Ever heard of it? . . . What! You've never even heard of it! Where have you been? Why, the little girl who plays the part of the deaf-mute is the greatest actress in the world today. She makes a monkey of Cornell. God! Are people dumb! Only see what's under their noses. Go and see this little girl. It'll be an experience you'll never forget. You'll have to hurry, though, because the picture's only going to be at the East Seventy-fifth Street Playhouse today and tomorrow. Wonderful bit of acting, I tell you. Wonderful!"

Don's closest friends were the Millikens, and when he called them to tell them he was married, you could have knocked Bess Milliken over with a feather.

"Married!" she gasped.

"That's what I said," he told her. "What's wrong with that?"

"Oh, nothing," she assured him. "Nothing at all. It's just so sudden. Do I know her?"

"Don't think you do," he said. "Grace Mintie."

"No," Bess Milliken said. "I don't think I do know her. Not that *that* proves anything, of course. There are millions of people I don't know." She laughed apologetically.

"Yes," he went on, "I met her on that cruise I took to Bermuda."

"Oh," she said slyly. "I remember your telling us you'd

never had a better time, but we didn't suspect *why*. Well, Don, it happens to all of us."

"What does?" he asked.

"Love," she answered softly. Then, fearing he might not like it if she were sentimental, she added brightly, "And when are we to meet her?"

"That's what I called about," he said. "How about next Friday night for dinner at our place?"

Waiting for Friday night, Bess Milliken worked herself into a frenzy of excitement. "What *can* she be like?" she asked her husband over and over. "She must be just about perfect for Don to pick her out. It's a wonder someone else didn't grab her first. I expect she's a combination of Griselda, Portia, and Hedy Lamarr. I don't think I can stand it until I see her."

She dressed for the dinner with care, remembering that Don had once said that her black lace dress made her face look like a tomato. She cautioned Bob against various things. "*Don't* chew the ice in your glass even if the pieces are small," she warned him. "It drives Don mad. And *don't* keep saying, 'That's one for the book.' I've seen Don look at you when you say that as though he could murder you. Just be quiet and nice. We don't want to send him off the very first time we see her. Goodness! She'll think his friends are pretty funny if she catches him just sitting and glaring at us."

"Well, don't you make those little bread balls," he answered in defense. "I've seen him look pretty funny when you do that, too."

The Gibsons had taken an apartment in the East Seventies. As the Millikens rang the bell, they could hear the

sound of a radio, and Bess Milliken had just time to look inquiringly at her husband when Don opened the door. "Come in, come in!" he cried with such enthusiasm that she wondered if by chance he had had some drinks that affected him the way they should.

In the living room, her chair drawn close to the radio, sat the bride. She was small and indeterminate-looking, and had a vague sort of prettiness. Her dress was beige and her hair blended with it; her skin was a slightly fairer shade. She looked up and smiled at them slowly and deliberately. "So happy to meet you, I must say," she said. "You're just in time. Amos 'n' Andy."

She spoke in a whisper.

"Oh," Bess Milliken said. "Are they—? But, of course!"

She felt that she should add words of greeting, but Grace Gibson had turned back to the radio and was listening intently to it. Don sat with his back to the light, looking at his wife. "He's mad about her," Bess Milliken thought. "He can't tear his eyes away from her."

There were dozens of potted plants in the room—rose begonias, ivies, sansevieria, all thriving. In front of one window was a terrarium, and in front of the other was a miniature Japanese garden. The feminine touch on everything was so apparent that the room looked almost indecent. Too many small pillows lay heaped on the couch and the windows were covered with glass curtains, fringed shades, rose-colored draperies, and tiebacks. A small, fragile ashtray sat on each table, surrounded by decorated boxes, china animals, and intricate cigarette lighters.

When the program was finished, Grace Gibson turned it off with a sigh. "I can't see how they can go on every

night that way," she said. "For years. Wonderful, isn't it?"

Both Bess and Bob looked uneasily at Don, but he was busy with bottles and glasses. "What will it be?" he asked jovially.

"Oh, anything," Bess told him. "Anything at all. You make heavenly dry Martinis."

"A dry Martini would be swell," Bob said.

Grace Gibson's face had an arch expression. "Under the circumstances, I think I should ask for an orange blossom."

"You said that last night," Don told her.

"So I did," she agreed. She got up and went into the kitchen, returning with a bowl of pink potato chips and some cocktail sausages spiked with colored toothpicks.

"You don't have to eat those things if you don't want to," Don announced.

"But they're so lovely-looking," his wife said. "And if eyes were made for seeing, then beauty is its own excuse for being."

Don groaned like an animal in torture. "Drink up," he said, passing the glasses around.

"You surprised us," Bess said amiably. "Getting married and being all nicely set up in your new home before we even knew a thing." She looked around for an ashtray on the table by her side and found one in the shape of a sea shell.

"I haven't got over it myself," Grace Gibson told her. "Imagine my being Mrs. Gibson!"

"You imagine it," Don answered fiercely. A familiar gleam shone in his eyes, and Bess Milliken moved uneasily in her chair. She looked anxiously at Grace, but she was smiling and sipping her drink.

"It was like a story in a book," she said. "Meeting on a boat and everything. We had a frightful quarrel the very first night we met. But I told Don afterward that a bad beginning was often the sign of a good ending."

"Oh, it will be, I'm sure," Bess agreed nervously.

"What's the matter with dinner?" Don asked. "I'm ready to eat. How about you, Bob?"

"Don is *too* funny," Grace Gibson told them fondly. "He's lived alone for so many years that he hasn't the faintest idea about a *home*. A home is not a hotel. He just wants to eat his cake and have it, too."

A subdued maid appeared in the doorway and announced that dinner was served, and they went into the dining room.

Bess Milliken thought she had never seen so many things on a table. There were silver candlesticks wired for electricity, topped by silk-and-lace pink shades, a silver bowl held small sweetheart roses and baby's breath, individual dishes were filled with salted almonds and mints, and the napkins were folded to represent birds in flight.

The fruit cup was topped by a green cherry and a red cherry and was made of canned fruit. Don, dipping his spoon into it, made a grimace of disgust. "Like a damned tearoom," he said.

"Tastes good to me," Bob Milliken told him gallantly.

"Delicious," Bess said.

"Don's like a naughty little boy at times," Grace explained. "I personally like things dainty. If they *look* pretty, they taste good, I always say."

She smiled faintly. In the soft glow from the lamps, she looked more indeterminate than ever and Bess Milliken wondered at her. "She is like a blotter," she thought.

She was puzzled by Don. He never took his eyes away from his wife, as though something in that small figure fascinated him. Yet his voice was harsh and irritated when he spoke to her and surprisingly calm and cheerful when he addressed Bob or herself. Even the small annoyances of the meal brought almost no comment from him. To be sure, he merely toyed with the vapid, lukewarm soup and his gray, dry slice of roast lamb; his attention seemed to be focused on his wife. As she went on talking endlessly in a tiresome monotone, he scowled, but there was a baffled admiration in his eyes.

"Say, I tell you what," he interrupted. "What say we all go to the theatre some night next week? Have dinner out and then go on to a show."

"Oh, that would be *nice!*" Grace exclaimed.

"We can eat at Henri's," he said, his face happy in anticipation.

Bess Milliken, remembering past scenes in Henri's, was doubtful. "Maybe we might try a new place," she said. She thought of the last time they had eaten there with Don, when the waiter had spilled some coffee on his salad.

"What's the matter with Henri's?" Don demanded. "It's a great place. Swell food. And what say we get the MacIntyres and the Brents and make a night of it. Throw sort of a party. How about it?"

Bess Milliken began to crumble the inside of her roll nervously into small balls; then, catching Bob's eye, she hastily put her hands in her lap. "Don must be mad," she thought. "Mary Brent drives him insane the way she laughs."

"All right," she agreed doubtfully.

"It won't matter where we eat, I'm sure," Grace said. "I always say when you're with *friends*, you're bound to have a nice time. It's not the place, it's the company."

For a moment Don's face clouded over and he stared at his wife with a wild look in his eyes. Then they cleared in an expression of relief. And Bess Milliken understood. She knew that in Grace he had segregated the thousands of small annoyances that had stung him like flies from every direction all his life. She held all the demons that prodded him. Everything she said and everything she did was so completely irritating that nothing in the world mattered by comparison. It was as though he had found the very source from which flowed the things that irked him. And having found it, he must keep it near him, under his eyes, where he could watch it and make sure it didn't gush too freely, so that he at last could go out into the world among his friends free to enjoy himself.

Bob Milliken looked at his wife. "Not the place, it's the company," he repeated. "That's one for the book. Eh, Bess?"

Don smiled. "You said it," he answered.

A Million Things to Do

THE two women walked down Fifth Avenue quickly, and their high heels clicked against the sidewalk. It was a gay sound, like the beat of castanets. Their hats, which they wore perched on the tops of their heads, were made of flowers and small bows, and the women dipped their heads like birds when they reached the cross streets, where the wind blew sharply from the East River. Occasionally, one of them would touch her hat lightly with her gloved hand, and then there would be a soft, jingling noise as her bracelets slid toward her elbow. They were both talking at the same time, and it seemed impossible that either could hear what the other was saying. But this was not so, as every now and then one woman would nod her head in agreement and smile brightly. When they got to the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-fifth Street, the woman who wore long silver-fox furs stopped abruptly and clutched her friend's arm. "Good Lord, darling," she said. "*Where* are we going?"

The other woman looked blankly up at the street sign. "Why, I don't *know*," she said. "How did we get so far downtown?"

They began to laugh. "Molly, I give you my word, I haven't the vaguest idea," the first woman said.

"Well," Molly said. "I know I hadn't *any* notion of going

any farther down than Fiftieth Street. I had the idea in back of my head somewhere that you wanted something or other that you'd set your heart on. You must know what it is, Rita."

Rita shook her head. "I can't think of a thing," she said. "I had sort of a feeling that *you* wanted something. Something at a place in a funny neighborhood, like a side street in the Thirties. I'm almost sure you did, because that's how we decided to walk in the first place. Don't you remember? You said something about this place, and I said something about it would do us good to walk."

"Isn't that the funniest thing!" Molly said. "I can't even think of it now!"

"Well, we have a million things to do," Rita said. "I've got to get back to Fifty-seventh Street for a fitting, and you wanted to look at Liberty scarves at Peck & Peck."

"I wanted to *ask* about them," Molly said. "I don't want to look at them, *really*. Virginia Willis was telling me something about a new shipment, and you know how she is. I just didn't believe her, so I wanted to ask about them and make sure."

"Where is Peck & Peck?" Rita asked. "Between what streets, I mean. I have an idea we passed it."

"We did," Molly said. "I remember a little plaid topcoat that I thought at the time would look darling on Connie's oldest girl. The one that's so hard to dress."

"Is she hard to dress?"

"Oh, my *dear!*"

They turned and started walking back uptown. "Now, we mustn't stay too long," Rita said. "Because I've got to be on time for my fitting. Madeline gets so furious. Someday

I'm going to say something to her. I mean a few minutes shouldn't make any difference to her."

"What's Connie's oldest girl's name?" Molly asked. "I've been trying to think of it ever since I saw that plaid coat."

"Virginia?"

"No," Molly said. "You thought of Virginia because we just mentioned Virginia Willis. This name's an odd name. You know the sort of thing Connie would think up. I'm perfectly positive that the child wasn't named for anybody."

"Sometimes I can think of names when I've heard them once," Rita said. "Particularly if they *rhyme* with something. I don't know as I consciously rhyme them. I just do it subconsciously, and when I start to remember, why, I have it instantly."

"I don't think this child's name rhymes with anything," Molly said. "It's a strange name. Like a last name more than a first name. Like Scott, only it isn't Scott. It's longer."

"Well, here we are," Rita said. They stopped and looked into the store window. "Do you *really* like that coat? Because, I must say, I don't at all. I don't like the *colors*. That funny shade of green and red."

"Yes, I like it," Molly said. "Not for myself, naturally, or not for you. But for Connie's child it would be just right. She's very good in strange shades."

"She'd have to have almost neutral coloring to wear that," Rita said. "Because if she were a decided blonde, or decided red-haired or brunette, it would wash out all her good points."

Molly sighed. "She hasn't many good points, poor child.

I think I'll just ask them how much it is, and then Connie can come down and look at it."

They entered the store and walked to the rear, where the coats, suits, and dresses hung on racks and in showcases.

"This girl looks intelligent," Molly said. "Let's ask her."

"Oh, Miss," Rita said. She walked toward a salesgirl who was standing near one of the racks. "Miss, I wonder if you could let us see that coat, the plaid coat, that you have in the window."

The salesgirl smiled at her. "What size?" she asked.

Rita turned to her friend. "What size, dear?" she asked.

Molly frowned and pursed her lips. "What size?" she repeated. "I don't really think I know."

"Now, Molly," Rita said. "Try to think. Is she as tall as you are?"

"I think she's almost as tall as I am," Molly answered. "Except I don't think she had on high heels, and I don't think she was quite as heavy as I am."

Rita laughed lightly. "You're not heavy, darling."

"Oh, of course I'm not *heavy*, but this girl is just a child. About fifteen or sixteen, I should say."

"If she looks like her father, she would be very slender," Rita said. "So suppose we say a size twelve and worry about the length *after*."

The salesgirl pushed open a sliding panel and brought out a green-and-plaid coat.

"I didn't notice the beaver on it, did you?" Molly asked.

"No, I didn't, to be perfectly truthful," Rita answered. She turned to the salesgirl. "Would you mind slipping it on so we can *see*?"

The salesgirl put the coat on and turned slowly before them. "Well, what do you think?" Rita asked.

"I think it's very nice. Really *very* nice. Except for the beaver," Molly answered.

"And the colors," Rita said. "I still can't say I really like those colors."

"We have this same coat in other combinations," the salesgirl said.

"No," Rita said firmly. "My friend has her heart set on those colors."

The two women smiled graciously at the salesgirl and thanked her. Then they walked out of the store.

"Now what?" Molly asked.

"My fitting," Rita reminded her.

"Well," Molly said, "if we're going to have to go all the way to Fifty-seventh Street, we're simply going to take a cab. I'm dead."

They hailed a cab and sank into the back seat. The driver turned to hear the address they wanted to go to. "Oh, yes," Molly said. "Fifty-seventh Street, between Sixth and Fifth. I'll tell you where when we get there."

The cab started. And suddenly Rita began to laugh. "Now I remember!" she said. "We were on our way to Shackman's. Don't you remember? I wanted to get some sort of joke for Ed. Let's go there now, and then we can go and have my fitting later."

"Let's! I love Shackman's," Molly said. "I found a little black vase in the shape of a corset there once. It was darling. I had it filled with flowers and had it sent to Sybil when she was in the hospital having her baby."

"It must have been *darling*," Rita said. "Well, I must say I'm glad we remembered."

They looked out of the windows, smiling agreeably. Then Rita leaned forward and called sharply to the driver. "Driver! Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Fifty-seventh Street, lady," he said.

"But we don't want to go to Fifty-seventh Street," Rita said. "We want to go to Thirty-fourth and Madison."

She turned and looked at Molly, raising her eyebrows. "It's funny he didn't hear us changing our minds," she said.

Tuberoses Are Lilies

MRS. SAXBY walked into the elevator and turned around briskly to face the door. As she moved, the coq feathers that fell from the side of her hat swept against her cheek. Her black suède bag was tucked under one arm and in her hand she carried a piece of paper on which was written a list of names:

Ed?

Harry—wallet or something leather

Molly—potpourri—sachet—heart-shaped maybe

Mrs. B.—not over $2

Helen? or one pair nylons—2 pr. silk

Myra—$5—Nile green

Miss Adams and Miss Wait—size 6½ and 7. Get money from Ed

Mr. Collins—liquor

Mrs. C.—card or handkerchief—$1

Nancy—charm bracelet?

She looked down at the list and then spoke to the elevator operator. "Toys?" she asked.

"Sixth floor, Madam," the operator said.

"Six," Mrs. Saxby said.

A tall, dark woman in a mink coat, which she wore thrown carelessly over her shoulders, got in the elevator. Mrs. Saxby's nostrils quivered as the scent of heavy per-

fume filled the small space. She pushed toward the door and smiled at the operator as she stepped out onto the ground floor once more. "I forgot something," she explained.

Her heels clicked against the hard floor as she walked toward the perfume counter, and she folded the list she carried and put it in her bag. She was out of breath when she finally reached the counter and she collapsed gently against it, leaning her elbows on the glass showcase.

"I've just done the most absurd thing," Mrs. Saxby said to the young woman behind the counter, who was making out a sales slip. "I was on the elevator—*on* it, mind you—and I asked the operator what floor *toys* were on and she said sixth, and suddenly this woman got on. A woman I've never even seen before, and she had on a heavy perfume—something with sandalwood in it, I think. And—well, it reminded me that I used to *love* heavy perfume. Lately I've been using Taunt. It's nice and spicy. But I really like a *heavier* perfume."

The young woman put her sales book aside. "Something heavier," she said. "Let's see."

Mrs. Saxby closed her eyes and opened them again. They were black and shining. "Tuberose," she said.

"Tuberose," the young woman repeated. "Yes, we have a tuberose." She walked down the counter a little and stood looking at the rows of bottles on the shelves. Then she selected one and brought it back to Mrs. Saxby.

Mrs. Saxby peeled off the glove of her left hand and the young woman rubbed some of the perfume on her wrist. Mrs. Saxby sniffed it delicately. "That's not tuberose," she said. "It's just a—well, it's just a plain rose. Pleasant. But *not* a tuberose."

She frowned and shrugged, turning to a woman who stood next to her as she did so. Immediately she was sorry. The woman wasn't at all the sort of woman she would have turned to for sympathy. She was blonde and looked brassy, and she too wore coq feathers in her hat. But there were too many of them, Mrs. Saxby thought.

The woman looked through Mrs. Saxby and spoke to the salesgirl. "Why don't you give her gardenia?" she asked. "Gardenia and tuberose smell the same."

Mrs. Saxby's laugh was icy. "They are *not* the same," she said. "They are simply *not*."

The woman raised her eyebrows. "I've picked thousands of them," she said. "And I should know. They *are* the same."

Mrs. Saxby turned and faced her. "I don't know why I'm bothering to explain this," she said, "but I happen to have been born in the South and I *know* tuberoses. And they are not the same as a gardenia. *And*, if you're talking of picking thousands of tuberoses, *I've* picked thousands of them. Our garden was *full* of them."

The woman's face turned a mottled red. "Well, I don't know what kind of tuberoses they have down *South*, as you say, but I am from the West Indies and *there* we consider them just like a gardenia."

Mrs. Saxby smiled. "*Where* in the West Indies?"

"That's the way we consider them," the woman said.

Mrs. Saxby kept on smiling. "I asked you *where* in the West Indies," she said, "because I happen to have lived in Puerto Rico. And I have seen the tuberoses there, and they were not like gardenias. Tuberoses are lilies."

"Puerto Rico!" the woman said. "Puerto Rico isn't in the West Indies."

Mrs. Saxby's voice grew a little shrill. "Isn't in the West Indies?" she repeated. "My dear woman, you must be mad."

She turned back to the salesgirl.

"Well, it isn't referred to as being in the West Indies," the woman said. "It's referred to as just Puerto Rico. I mean you don't think of it as being in the West Indies."

"I do," Mrs. Saxby said coldly. "And I might as well add that I have seen thousands and thousands of tuberoses and *smelled* them in the gardens of the Governor's Palace, *where* I had gone for tea."

"That may be," the woman said. "But they are like gardenias."

Mrs. Saxby looked at the salesgirl and smiled. "It doesn't matter," she said. "Just give me a bottle of Taunt, the twelve-fifty size, will you, my dear?"

"Taunt," the salesgirl said.

"And charge and send it to me. Mrs. Edward Saxby, 24 East Sixty-eighth Street, Apartment 12-B."

Mrs. Saxby watched the girl as she wrote down the name and address. She turned and started away but felt impelled to stop and face the woman once more. When she spoke, her voice was low and sweet. "I wonder if you happen to know Chloe Baynes' Flower Shop?" she asked. "Of course, you must know it, but I wondered."

"I know it," the woman answered.

"Well," Mrs. Saxby said, "Miss Baynes happens to be very fond of tuberoses. As fond of them as I am. And you might stop in and ask her to *show* you a tuberose. Because maybe what you were picking thousands of weren't tuberoses at all."

The woman opened her mouth to answer, but Mrs.

Saxby was on her way. She hurried across the store and out the door. Her cheeks were flaming. On the street she started toward Park Avenue, and on Park Avenue she walked until she came to Chloe Baynes' Flower Shop. She smiled when she saw Miss Baynes was in the shop.

"Oh, Miss Baynes," she said, "have you any tuberoses today?"

Miss Baynes came out from behind the desk and walked toward the glassed-in refrigerator which held cut flowers. "A few," she said. "I don't know how fresh they are."

"Oh, I didn't want any," Mrs. Saxby said. "I just wondered if you'd mind doing something for me. There's a woman who might come in asking about them. She's a sort of blonde and she has a hat something like mine, only *wrong*. Well, I wondered if you would mind showing her a tuberose and when you show it to her just say that it is a *lily*. I mean just say that it isn't anything like a gardenia."

"Why, of course, Mrs. Saxby," Miss Baynes said.

"Not that gardenias aren't sweet, too," Mrs. Saxby said. "How much are the big ones?"

"A dollar," Miss Baynes said.

"I think I'll take one. Just to wear," Mrs. Saxby said. "Will you pin it on my coat? And quite high toward the neck, if you don't mind."

She stooped graciously, so that Miss Baynes could fasten it without reaching.

A Little Poison Never Hurt Anybody

MRS. ADAMS turned her head so that she could see her reflection in a shop window as she walked past. As the glass foreshortened her body and made her look slightly dumpy, she kept her eyes fixed on the reflection of her hat, which was trimmed with pheasant feathers that curved across her cheek. When it was windy, the feathers blew up over her head, and often sailors and soldiers who saw her from across the street whistled at her or whooped like Indians. It was true that from a distance she had a giddy appearance. Her feet were small in their gay, platform, open-toed shoes, and the cape she wore disguised the slight matronliness of her figure. The quick glimpse she had of herself reminded her that she must carry her head up and remember not to smile or frown too much. She turned her head away and spoke to the woman who was walking almost a foot behind her. "I suppose it's foolish of me to be thinking of a ring in these times," she said. "But *someone* has to be foolish or everything would stop altogether. At least, that's the way it seems to me."

The other woman was panting slightly. She was not fat, exactly, but she had the figure of a pigeon. Her legs were slender. Her bosom and waist were substantial. Mrs. Adams

thought it was too bad that Millie didn't have more dash. Since they had met at a cocktail party almost a year ago, Mrs. Adams had tried to do a lot for her by suggestion. When they had lunch together, for instance, Mrs. Adams made a point of ordering a plain meat sandwich with no mayonnaise on gluten bread, hoping that Millie would take the hint, which she never did. And when Mrs. Adams ordered tea or coffee, she always told the waitress not to bother with the sugar, and took a small, etched silver box from her bag and laid it on the table. The box held her saccharine. It was strange, Mrs. Adams thought, that Millie didn't seem to catch on. Once Millie had ordered a shrimp-salad roll with Russian dressing and Mrs. Adams had ordered one too. When they came, Mrs. Adams pushed away the top half of the roll with her fork, saying emphatically, "All that bread!" Millie looked doubtfully at her roll. For a minute Mrs. Adams thought she had won, and then Millie laughed. "I suppose," she said. "But the rolls are so good here."

Now, walking in back of Mrs. Adams, Millie took two or three little running steps. "I didn't hear what you were saying, dear," she said.

"About my ring," Mrs. Adams said. "I suppose it's foolish."

"Oh, I don't know," Millie said. "It's not as though you were going to buy a whole new ring. After all, you *have* the diamond."

"One of my mother's earrings," Mrs. Adams murmured. "I should have had them both, but you know Lida! She got there before I did when poor Mother passed on, and she's like a crow. I said to Harry at the time, I said, 'I don't

mind in the least, except Mother always said they were to be mine, and anything, but anything, shiny would have been the same to Lida.' It was sentiment with me."

The two women walked into a small jewelry store and tossed their bags onto the top of the glass showcase. It was warm from the electric-light bulbs that were used to show the jewelry in the case to better advantage.

"Here we are!" Mrs. Adams said gaily to the man behind the counter. "This is my friend Mrs. Cosgrove. Millie, this is Mr. Harris, who made my clips."

Millie and Mr. Harris nodded and smiled at each other. "And now, Mr. Harris," Mrs. Adams said, "I'd like you to show Mrs. Cosgrove my earring *and* tell her about the lovely idea you have for the ring."

"Assuredly," Mr. Harris said. He fumbled in a drawer behind the counter and brought out a chamois bag. He set a black velvet square on the counter and shook the bag over it. A shining white diamond fell out. The diamond was set in gold.

"It's lovely," Millie said. "Sweet, really. And made for a pierced ear, too!"

Mrs. Adams sighed. "If I'd gotten both," she said, "I would have had my ears pierced."

"Mrs. Adams is flattering me when she asks me to tell you my design," Mr. Harris said. "I think I can safely say *my* design is Mrs. Adams' design." He frowned and cleared his throat. "You see, Mrs. Adams thought of a brown diamond."

"A brown diamond!" Millie repeated. "I never heard of one."

"They *are* unusual," Mr. Harris agreed. "But I've found one." He looked at Mrs. Adams triumphantly.

"You haven't!" Mrs. Adams said. "I can't believe it. I thought you'd have to look and look."

Mr. Harris lowered his eyes modestly and, reaching once more into the drawer, brought out a package wrapped in tissue paper. When he had opened it, he took a small pair of tweezers and picked up a diamond, which he set carefully beside the earring.

"Beautiful!" Mrs. Adams said. "Beautiful."

"Just like a topaz," Millie said.

Mr. Harris looked at her sharply. "I beg to disagree," he said. "Not like a topaz. A topaz has no fire. This stone, if you will examine it under the light, *has* fire."

"Oh, fire, of course," Millie said. "I was speaking of the color."

"Even the color," Mr. Harris said. "The color is not the same. It is richer."

"Perfect!" Mrs. Adams said. "And unusual! Set side by side—"

"In antiqued gold," Mr. Harris interruped. "Exquisitely simple."

"Perfect!" Mrs. Adams repeated. "You see, Millie, I know it's foolish. I mean, it would be foolish if I'd bought a real diamond."

"The brown diamond is a real diamond," Mr. Harris reminded her.

"Oh, of course," Mrs. Adams said. "I know that. But it isn't as though I were buying a fine stone like the one in the earring."

Mr. Harris coughed and looked down discreetly. Mrs.

Adams tilted her head to one side and when she spoke her voice had lost some of its warmth. "A brown diamond is different," she said. "There's not much *call* for brown diamonds."

"They're rare," Mr. Harris said. "Not popular, maybe, but rare."

"And how much is the diamond?" Mrs. Adams asked.

Mr. Harris spoke quietly and firmly. "Six hundred and fifty dollars."

Mrs. Adams' eyes flickered once. "I see," she said. "With or without tax?"

"Without," Mr. Harris said. "And without the setting, of course."

Mrs. Adams picked up her bag. "Well," she said, "I'll think it over and call you. It's not that I mind the price, but there *is* a war on, you know, and I think I'd better look around a little. Come, Millie."

She nodded brightly and smiled. Her eyes were fixed at a point over Mr. Harris's head.

Out on the street, Mrs. Adams turned to Mrs. Cosgrove. "Did you ever!" she said. "For a brown diamond. I never was so surprised in my life. It's really wicked."

"It *is* wicked," Millie agreed. "For anything that looks so much like a topaz."

"To be perfectly frank, I don't think I could tell the difference." Mrs. Adams glanced down at her watch. "Goodness! I'm due at the doctor's. I'll drop you off."

They walked to the curb and stood waiting for a taxi. "The idea!" Millie said. "All that money for what might as well be a topaz. I think you're being very sensible in not considering it."

Mrs. Adams had a warm feeling toward Millie. "I tell you what," she said, "you come to the doctor's, too."

"I haven't anything," Millie said.

"Don't be silly," Mrs. Adams said. "Neither have I. I just get these injections." She waved at a cab, which pulled up beside the two women.

"Come along and don't argue," Mrs. Adams said. They got into the cab.

"Park Avenue between Seventy-second and Seventy-third. I've forgotten the number," Mrs. Adams said to the driver.

Millie sat back in the cab, looking worried. "But what sort of injection?" she asked.

"Listen, my dear," Mrs. Adams said. "This doctor is a very good doctor. And he's a perfect lamb. He gives them to me. I feel divine on them."

"What are they?" Millie asked.

"Oh," Mrs. Adams said, "he told me once, but I've forgotten. They couldn't possibly hurt you. *That* I do know. I think they have strychnine or something in them."

"Strychnine is poison," Millie said.

"Well, then, it isn't strychnine," Mrs. Adams said. "Because this doctor is a lamb and he wouldn't be giving people poison, except perhaps in small quantities. Poison is often very good in small quantities."

"Well," Millie said doubtfully, "I'll go with you, but I don't think I'll have one."

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Adams said. "I was going to buy you a drink anyway, only there wasn't time because I have this appointment. Besides, I was out of saccharine, and I always put saccharine in my drinks instead of sugar." She glanced

quickly at Millie to see if she had caught the significance of this last remark.

"Well," Millie said.

"Now look!" Mrs. Adams said. "I want to do this for you. After all, if it hadn't been for you and your saying what you did about the topaz, that man might have sold me that diamond. And these injections are really wonderful. I've felt perfect ever since I started them. I never get tired." She leaned forward and tapped on the glass. "Here," she called. "Right here, driver." She fumbled in her bag and brought out a dollar. "Give me a quarter," she said.

The two women got out of the cab and walked to the entrance of a maisonette. Mrs. Adams rang the bell and a nurse in a white uniform opened the door.

"You ought to have about twelve of them," Mrs. Adams said to Millie, "but I should think one would do *something.*"

They stood in the waiting room, which opened into the doctor's office. Mrs. Adams loosened the fastening of her cape. The nurse opened the door to the office and beckoned them in, and the two women walked through the door, their heels tapping lightly on the bare wood as they crossed the threshold. The doctor was a heavy man who wore a dark gray suit with a discreet pin stripe. There was a cornflower in his buttonhole.

Mrs. Adams held out her hand. "Here I am," she said. "On the dot. And I've brought my dear friend Mrs. Cosgrove with me. She wants one of those things I get."

The doctor looked up at them. His eyelids were heavy and his eyes were tired. He put his hands on the top of his desk and stood up.

Mrs. Adams took Millie's arm and squeezed it. "I'm so glad I thought of it," she said. "I'm crazy about them and it's just like a pinprick."

"You go first," Millie said.

"No. You go first, my dear," Mrs. Adams said generously. "I can't wait to see if you'll notice the difference."

She turned to the doctor and smiled at him coquettishly. "Mrs. Cosgrove's injection is on me," she said.

Something for a Man in His Forties

MILLIE SANDERS telephoned to her friend Elise Adams one night about eleven o'clock and spoke in a whisper. "Elise, is that you?" she asked. "Well, this is Millie."

Mrs. Adams settled comfortably back in her bed and rested the receiver on a small embroidered pillow near her ear. By turning her head slightly she could both talk and hear without having to use her hand to hold the instrument in place. This left her free to smoke and to sip the cup of hot bouillon which she always drank before going to sleep. "I thought you'd call," she said. "I was going to wait about ten minutes, and then if you didn't call, I was going to call you. What are you whispering about?"

"Listen, my dear," Millie said. "Sam's in the tub and he can't hear a thing. You know how he lets the water run and run. Well, I'm just about crazy. His birthday's day after tomorrow and I can't think of a thing."

"Can't think of a thing!" Mrs. Adams repeated. "Hasn't he even an *idea*?"

"Well," Millie said. "First I sort of fished around, and then I came right out, and he wants underwear. Underwear and socks."

Mrs. Adams reached over for a cigarette and lit it. "Ridiculous!" she said. "Underwear isn't a present. At least, not for a man."

"That's what I thought," Millie said. "I told him. I said I just can't buy underwear."

"Those shorts," Mrs. Adams said scornfully. "And those ribbed shirt things."

"Exactly," Millie agreed. "So can you meet me tomorrow and we'll put our heads together?"

"Of course I can," Mrs. Adams said. "And we'd better start early. Say half past eleven?"

"Half past eleven will be fine," Millie said. "And at the bag counter at Saks. If you're late I want to have something to look at."

"First, I think you'd better decide what you want to spend," Mrs. Adams said. "That'll save a lot of time."

"Well, I thought about fifty," Millie said. "Of course, it would be nice if I could get something for less. But I'm willing to go fifty. I got my interest check."

"Fifty is loads," Mrs. Adams told her. "And I'll see you tomorrow."

Mrs. Adams was at the bag counter promptly at eleven-thirty the next day, but she didn't see Millie. She walked to the end of the aisle, where she could watch the Fifth Avenue entrance, and stood impatiently tapping one foot. She felt vaguely out of sorts, partly because her new rayon stockings sagged around her ankles slightly and partly because the skirt of her new suit hadn't buttoned around her waist as easily as it had when she first bought it. She waited, looking at the women as they passed by, glancing at them sharply and disapprovingly. Suddenly someone

touched her on the shoulder and she turned around. It was Millie, slightly out of breath, and she was carrying a package. Mrs. Adams looked at the package and said nothing.

"I've done the most awful thing," Millie said. "I was ten minutes early and I got to snooping around, and of course the leather bags were out of the question, but I kept thinking of my beige, and I saw this beige bag. A cloth one. Well, my dear, I bought it."

"I thought you wanted a blond alligator," Mrs. Adams said. "That's what you told me, and that's what I've been keeping an eye out for. If I'd have known that you'd have considered a cloth one—"

"It was only twelve-fifty," Millie said. "And it isn't bad at all. It has two bows at either end."

Mrs. Adams frowned. "Did you charge it?" she asked.

"No," Millie said. "I paid cash."

"Then that only leaves you thirty-seven fifty for Sam." Mrs. Adams sighed. "Thirty-seven fifty isn't fifty. There's a great difference."

They started to walk toward the door. "Well," Millie said. "If we can't find something, we just can't, that's all. I mean, he did ask for underwear."

"If you're going to think like that," Mrs. Adams said. "I won't go with you. I won't even consider the *striped* kind or some of the little checks."

They stepped out onto the street. The day was bright and sunny and the cherries which Mrs. Adams wore on the top of her head clicked gaily in the breeze. "I think we'd better go right to a *man's* store," she said.

They walked to the curb and hailed a taxi. There was

an air of coolness between them. When they got out, Mrs. Adams stood aside and let Millie pay the fare. After all, she thought, it's for her husband, and if she can pay for a new bag, she can pay for the taxi.

In the store, they walked aimlessly around, looking into showcases. They felt lost and depressed. "I did scarves and things of that sort for Christmas," Millie said.

"Scarves and ties are banal, my dear," Mrs. Adams said. "I think we'd better ask that man." She pointed to the section manager, who stood near a display of fishing tackle.

"He wouldn't know," Millie said. "After all, Sam is my husband and I do know something about him. I know he has a camera, for instance, and I certainly know enough after all these years not to get him anything faintly approaching anything of that sort. It just makes him mad."

Mrs. Adams ignored her and went up to the section manager. "We are looking for a nice little gift for a man," she said. "A man in his forties. It's his birthday."

The section manager looked down at her and smiled. "Our gift department is on the fourth floor," he said. "You'll find a carefully selected assortment there. And if you do *not*, you might consult our shopper."

Mrs. Adams eyed him coldly. "Thank you," she said. She turned to Millie. "Never in my life have I had to go to a shopper. Of all things."

"Those people don't know," Millie said. "How could they know what to do about Sam when I don't? He's been awfully touchy, anyway. This morning, for instance, I said to him, I said, 'Sam, we'd better get Gilbert to do something about those things.' And he flew off the handle. He could hardly eat his breakfast. Of course, I meant Vin-

cent, and I don't know what made me say Gilbert. And I meant the trunks in the basement. It was just that he didn't choose to understand."

They stepped into the elevator and rode, without speaking, to the fourth floor. It was obvious that the fourth floor was devoted to the sale of gifts. Ashtrays, cigarette lighters, cameras, pipes, and tobacco jars were arranged on tables, while larger and more expensive gifts, such as outdoor grills and small bars, had been placed about the room. Mrs. Adams, looking sharply around, gave a small cry of delight. "Look, Millie," she said. "If that isn't *unusual*!" She pointed to a rustic table in the middle of which was a hole, and in the hole rested a rustic bucket. The two women hurried toward it.

"Did you ever!" Millie said. "I wonder what it's for?"

"To eat on," Mrs. Adams said. "And that bucket's for the punch or what have you, because there are dippers hanging from those wooden pegs." She looked at the legs of the table for the price tag. "It's seventy dollars. Did you ever! Not that seventy dollars would be so much. I mean, you could have added twenty to the fifty. I would have even lent you the twenty. But you've dug into it."

"It's nice," Millie admitted, and sighed regretfully. "But I don't know . . ."

A salesman approached and stood a slight distance away from them. "Are you ladies looking for something definite or are you just looking around?" he asked.

"We're looking for something definite," Mrs. Adams said. "Something for a man in his forties. For his birthday."

The salesman's face shone with an inner light. "We have something very new," he said. "Just follow me."

He walked to a counter in the middle of the store and, hurrying behind it, he stooped and brought up a round leather case.

"Oh," Millie said. "That looks as though it had poker chips in it. My husband has some poker chips. He's had them since he was in college. He never even uses them."

"Wait," the salesman said. He opened the box with a flourish. It held poker chips, but they were like no poker chips the two women had ever seen. They were chartreuse, lemon yellow, and a dusty tan color. On the surface of each chip was printed "The Browns."

"What lovely colors!" Mrs. Adams said.

Millie looked at them, fascinated. "They're absolutely beautiful," she said. "Instead of those old red, white, and blue things."

"I can't believe it," Mrs. Adams said. "If we'd looked all day!"

"I know," Millie sighed.

Elise Adams nudged her and whispered, "Ask how much they are."

"Oh," Millie said to the salesman. "How much are they?"

"Fifty dollars," he said. "We just got them in this morning. We call them personalized poker chips."

As Mrs. Adams watched in amazement, Millie opened her bag. She counted out thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents and laid it on the counter. "This is for a deposit," she said. "And I'll stop by later in the afternoon and pay for the rest. That is, if you can have them marked by tomorrow."

"I think we can arrange that," the salesman said. "Con-

sidering it's the gentleman's birthday. How would you like them marked?"

"Just have them marked The Sanders," Millie told him. She gave him her name and address and smiled as she waited. Then she nodded to the salesman and walked away with Mrs. Adams.

"Millie!" Mrs. Adams said. "You're going to return your bag!"

"Exactly," Millie said firmly.

"Well," Mrs. Adams said, "I think that's sweet of you." She took Millie's arm. "I'll pay for the lunch."

"And another thing," Millie said, "no one could help but be wild about those chips. I never saw such wonderful colors. I guess Sam will be floored, all right. I guess he won't be so touchy when he sees those."

"Oh," Mrs. Adams said, "any way you look at it, it's worth it."

Millie's smile was smug. "*I* think so," she said.

Table for One

IT WAS one o'clock and the tearoom was crowded. Women waited in a long line that reached back to the cashier's desk, and at the front of the line behind a red velvet rope stood the hostess. Her hair was slightly metallic and she wore a black dress with a neat white collar. She had an air of calm, but her state of mind was shown by the flush of her cheeks and the rather wild look in her eyes. The women pushed against the rope and called out, "Two, please" or "Three, please," and the hostess would turn and hold up two or three fingers to another hostess who moved about among the tables.

Mrs. Burch hurried through the swinging door that led from the street and walked past the candy counter to the waiting line. On one side of her head she wore a parrot pinned to a tiny piece of felt that served as a hat, and as she walked she freed her elbows from her leopard cape and used them effectively to make a path for herself. She forced her way to the head of the line, threw back her head, lifted her eyebrows, and said, "One, please."

"Will you wait at the end of the line, if you don't mind?" the hostess said.

"I see no reason why I should," Mrs. Burch said. "I want a place for one." She stared at the hostess. "I am not here with a *group*," she went on. "I merely want to

have a bite and get out as quickly as I can, I assure you."

A small man wearing glasses walked up and stood next to Mrs. Burch. "Hello, there, Miss Fields," he said.

The hostess's eyes softened and grew less wild. "Oh, Mr. Henderson," she said.

"See here," Mrs. Burch said. "I see two women leaving that table against the wall."

"That table is for two, Madam," the hostess said. Her eyes darted from table to table. "But there is one to share next to the post."

"Very well," Mrs. Burch said.

The hostess unfastened the rope and Mrs. Burch walked to the table and sat down in the empty chair.

The table was mussed. There were two dishes of melted ice cream, and in the one in front of Mrs. Burch someone had crushed out a cigarette, the end of which was stained with lipstick. Paper napkins and paper doilies lay rumpled on the table, and the teacups and water glasses showed traces of lipstick. Mrs. Burch glanced at them with distaste and then coolly appraised the woman who sat across from her. She was a plump woman in a blue wool dress, and she wore a blue felt beret trimmed with a gilt arrow. Mrs. Burch looked away and sighed, holding in her stomach as she did so.

Someone passing hit the back of her chair and she turned quickly. She saw that it was the man with the glasses, and she watched him as he made his way to the table against the wall and sat down. "Well!" she said.

Her eyes were as sharp and bright as a bird's as she waited until she could catch the hostess's eye. When she did, she raised her hand and beckoned with her first finger.

The hostess hurried to her side. Mrs. Burch moved her chair and nodded toward the man in the glasses. "Is that gentleman expecting someone?" she asked.

"I really don't know," the hostess said.

"Did he *say* he was?" Mrs. Burch asked.

"Why, no," the hostess said. Immediately she realized that she had fallen into a trap.

"Then why," Mrs. Burch said, speaking very clearly, "did you tell *me* that table was for *two* when the gentleman is obviously *one*?"

The hostess began to pick up the crumpled napkins nervously. "Well, he eats here every day and—"

Mrs. Burch laughed. "Well, I don't eat here *every* day," she said. "I should hate to think that I ate *anywhere* every day, but I do drop in for a bite and a cup of tea *quite* often, and I object to being told that a table is for two and then have you seat someone else there."

"He always likes to sit with his back to the wall," the hostess said. "On the banquette."

Mrs. Burch's voice was amused. "Really!" she said. "Well, *I* like to sit on the banquette, too, and I daresay this lady would like to sit on the banquette." She turned and nodded toward the woman who sat across the table.

"Mrs. Potter," the woman said.

"I daresay Mrs. Potter would like to sit on the banquette," Mrs. Burch said.

"I'm sorry," the hostess said. "If you'll just give me your order, I'll have the table cleared."

"No," Mrs. Burch said. "We will not give our order." She sat back in her chair and smiled up at the hostess sweetly. "We will wait until you explain the situation to

the gentleman, who seems, by the way, to be a favorite of yours. We will wait, in fact, until hell freezes over."

At the word "hell," Mrs. Potter looked anxiously at the hostess, and Mrs. Burch, seeing her look, nodded at her reassuringly. Mrs. Potter studied the hostess, saw the spots of rouge high on her cheekbones and her flushed face. Then she glanced at Mrs. Burch, who was cool and unruffled. She noticed Mrs. Burch's beautiful suède bag, her sapphire-and-diamond ring, and the dark red of her nail polish. She realized that for the first time in her life she was up against an iron hand in a velvet glove.

The hostess realized it, too. Without a word, she turned away from the table and walked over to the man with the glasses. Leaning over him, she whispered. He nodded and rose. He took his hat and overcoat and walked over to where Mrs. Burch and Mrs. Potter were sitting. Mrs. Burch got up and nodded brightly to the hostess. "That's better," she said. She turned to Mrs. Potter. "You come, too, my dear," she said.

Mrs. Potter started to put on her coat.

"Just throw it over your shoulders," Mrs. Burch said.

The two women walked over to the table next to the wall. "You sit on the banquette," Mrs. Burch said. "I don't care about it, really. It's just that if you let people walk over you, they will. That's all."

She sat down and settled herself comfortably. Then she picked up the menu and held it about three feet from her eyes so that she could read it.

The man in the glasses took the chair Mrs. Burch had vacated. He was eating his lunch before the two women had made up their minds what they wanted to order.

Holy Night

THE minister's house stood next to the church and about fifty yards back from the street. It looked larger than it was because of the heavy and elaborate porch which ran across the front and along one side of it. Two tall pine trees grew near the house on either side of the walk that led to the porch steps, and on the lawn there were other trees—elm, yellow oak, and white birch. In the summer, when they were in full leaf, they were overpowering and made the house too dark. The people in the town of Monroe, Connecticut, said they were magnificent specimens, and it never occurred to anyone to thin them out.

The new minister, Horace Griswold, and his wife, Edith, had been a little disappointed with the house when they moved to Monroe in June. They were fairly young, in their late thirties, and Mrs. Griswold prided herself on being modern. "Of course, I'm proud of being a minister's wife," she would say to the less conservative members of the congregation. "But, after all, I'm a *person*, too." She would laugh a little. "I tell Horace he can be the *parson* and I'll just be a *person*."

Everyone in Monroe had liked the Griswolds instantly. For one thing, they didn't seem too poor, and it was rumored that Mrs. Griswold had money of her own. Certainly, the house began to look as though it had had a little

money spent on it. The old chandeliers had been removed from the living room and the dining room, and the living room was lighted softly by two lamps with apothecary jars for bases and one standing lamp; in the dining room there were wall brackets with parchment shades, although the Griswolds dined by candlelight.

Horace Griswold was a handsome man with a good baritone voice. His sermons were mildly fervent but never embarrassing. And on Labor Day, when "The Importance of Being Earnest" was given in the school auditorium and he was cast as Algernon Moncrieff, everyone thought he was marvellous and not at all like a minister. He had even taken two Scotch-and-sodas after the performance at the party at Mrs. Wylie's, and after the second one he had sung "D'Ye Ken John Peel."

He was fine about the war, too. He signed up as an airplane-spotter and took the 2-to-4-A.M. watch whenever he was asked. Of course, now that the spotters could sit in the glassed-in enclosure on the school roof, the watches weren't so bad, but until December 1st there had only been a little shack on Janner's Hill, which was cold and lonely. Not that anyone had really complained, but all the spotters were glad when the Hartford people grumbled about the Monroe people being able to spot planes before they did. The school roof wasn't as high as Janner's Hill.

As Christmas came near, there was as much activity around the church as seemed decently possible in war times. Horace Griswold organized a group of carol singers and had his eye on a fine, straight spruce tree for the basement of the church, where the Sunday-school classes were held. And, although the children had decorated the base-

ment two weeks before Christmas with wreaths of ground pine and bells cut out of red paper and mounted on cardboard, the tree was not to be set up until Christmas Eve because of the Victory Bridge Game that afternoon. There were twenty tables for bridge, a buffet with sandwiches, cake, and tea, and, as the basement room was not very large, there was no place for the tree until the committee removed the tables.

Mrs. Griswold was in charge of the Victory Bridge Game, the proceeds of which were to go to the American Red Cross, and it was almost six when the last of the tables had been put away and she locked the door of the basement room. She carried a basket filled with a dozen used teacups and part of a cake that had been left over. She was excited and a little tired as she stood talking to Mrs. Wylie and Miss Champlin, who had stayed to help clean up. "I really should rush," she said. "Of course, I couldn't eat a bite, but Horace has to be fed, poor dear. He walked goodness knows where to get the tree and he's probably ravenous."

The three women walked out across the hard, frozen lawn to Mrs. Wylie's car. "I'm just going to have a little soup," Mrs. Wylie said. "And I want to have a few minutes to change my things. I'll *try* to be back at eight to help with the tree, but I'm really looking forward to the carols."

"Yes," Miss Champlin said. "I think we should sing in front of every house on the green by all means, and we *must* be at Mrs. Fisher's before it gets too late. She will love the singing so."

Mrs. Griswold sighed. "The children won't take long," she said. "Not more than an hour. They have to be in bed,

anyway. They can help with the tree and enjoy it a few minutes and then we can get started."

Mrs. Wylie climbed into the car. "Well, as long as we make Mrs. Fisher's by eleven," she said. "She's going to have mulled wine and I know she was planning for eleven."

"Oh, we'll make it easy by eleven," Mrs. Griswold said. "Horace and I will just snatch a bite, and he was doing his sermon when I left, so he won't have that on his mind. We'll have the tree all set up by the time you get there."

Mrs. Wylie switched on the ignition of her car and stepped on the starter. "Hurry up!" she called to Miss Champlin. "Get in! Can't waste gas, you know."

Mrs. Griswold waved to them and then turned and started toward her house. As she walked up the path under the trees she thought at first there was no light in the house, but as she reached the porch she saw a faint light from the open fire shining through the living-room windows. She opened the door and went in.

The hall was cold and she set her basket down and walked into the living room. The lamps were not lit and she switched the tall bridge light on. Horace was sitting in front of the fire, and for a moment she thought he was asleep. Then he got up and stood facing her.

"Goodness," she said. "What are you doing sitting here in the dark?" She turned on the lights at either end of the couch and sat down, closing her eyes and loosening the wool scarf which she wore around her neck. "We made forty dollars," she said.

"That's great," he said.

"Well, it's not much when you consider all the money there is in this town," she said. "I think we could have

charged a dollar and got away with it. And the food didn't cost a cent. I brought some cake home. Mrs. Wylie took what was left of the sandwiches. Everyone brought her own sugar, too. They sell little red-white-and-blue envelopes now to carry it in. They're quite cute."

Horace didn't answer, and she opened her eyes and looked at him sharply. "What's the matter with you?" she asked.

He coughed and, picking up the poker, began to push at the logs gently with it. "Nothing," he said.

Mrs. Griswold got up suddenly and briskly. "Well," she said, "we've got to rush. Is your sermon all right?"

"I didn't do it," he said.

Her eyes opened wide and she stared at him. "Didn't do it?" she repeated. "Why not, I'd like to know?"

"I couldn't think of anything to say," he said.

Her laugh was scornful. "Couldn't think of anything to say *this* Christmas of all Christmases!" she said. "Why, you could say a few words and ask people to pray!"

"Who are they going to pray for?" he asked.

"I wish you'd stop fooling with that poker," she said. "They can pray for everybody. For the armed forces and everybody. That's simple enough."

He put the poker back in the stand and his face was puzzled and his eyes bewildered. "I thought of praying for everybody," he said, "but I'm afraid it won't do."

For a moment his wife seemed embarrassed. "Well, *everybody*," she said. "Naturally, I didn't mean *everybody*. There are some people not worth praying *for*."

"I don't know," he said.

"Well, I do," she said. "You can't pray for everybody and not offend a lot of people right here in town."

He walked over to the window and stood looking out across the porch. A branch from the pine tree moved in the wind and scraped against the house.

"How can you pray for everybody when Mrs. Wylie's two nephews are heaven knows where this very minute?" Mrs. Griswold asked. "How do you think she'd feel? How about Mrs. Fisher and her grandson in the Navy? They'd think it was—well, odd, to say the least."

He watched the pine tree, which looked black against the dim lights of the street. "I've been thinking all afternoon," he said, "and I don't know what to do."

"What did you do last year?" Mrs. Griswold asked. "I don't know what's the matter with you. You wrote your sermon last year like a breeze."

"I don't feel the way I did last year," he said.

His wife got up and walked over to him, laying her hand firmly on his arm. "Well, stop thinking," she said. "It doesn't really matter. Just say some prayers for the armed forces and ask forgiveness if you have to."

"Forgiveness for whom?" he asked.

"Forgiveness for all the other people, naturally," she said.

"I don't know," he said slowly. "I don't know as I want to forgive."

She took her hand from his arm. "I only suggested it because you seem to want to," she said. "Or something. I'm sure I don't know."

The tears came to her eyes and her cheeks flushed. "I know one thing," she went on. "You seem to be trying to

spoil everything. We've got to eat and drag that tree over there by eight o'clock. I *suppose* you got the tree!"

"No," he said. "I haven't even got the tree."

She turned toward him angrily, but her voice was quiet when she spoke. "You can just get the tree," she said. "You can just get it. I've been working like a dog over that bridge party all afternoon and you've been sitting here like a fool. You can just get it. Now!"

"What about the children?" he asked.

"What children?"

"The children all over the world," he said.

"There are children right here in town, in case you've forgotten," she said. She turned and started toward the door. "And if you ask me, I think you'd better snap out of it."

At the doorway she stopped. "Horace," she said. "Really! You act as though you'd been *called* or something." Her voice grew sharp with amusement. "I hope you suddenly don't think you've been *called,* because if I ever thought you'd pull that on me, I certainly never would have married you!"

She ran out the door and up the stairs, and he could hear her laughing. After a few minutes he walked out to the kitchen and picked up the axe which lay beside the woodbox. As he held it in his hand, it seemed important to him that he should hurry up the hill and through the woods where the tree stood so that he could slash at it with desperate, heavy blows.

Young Man

MARTIN ROGERS opened the door of the apartment. He had almost run from the subway and he was out of breath. His wool scarf hung unevenly around his neck and his overcoat was unbuttoned. "I'm late," he said.

He could hear the water running in the sink, which was shut off from the rest of the room by a screen. The screen hid the small stove, too, and the even smaller electric refrigerator. His wife stepped out from behind the screen and he hurried toward her. "Are you?'" she asked. She held up her sharp young face to be kissed.

"Sure I am," he said. "When I pass the clock at the drugstore, it's usually five to six. It was one after six tonight."

He stood with his arms around her. "You've got your hat on, *Marty*!" she told him. He laughed as though she had said something uproariously funny and threw his hat across the room. It landed on the floor.

"You're cute," he said. "Got my hat on! You're cute. I must have missed a train or something. I must have walked slower."

"It doesn't matter," she said.

"What do you mean it doesn't matter?" He kissed her six times. "One, two, three, four, five, six," he said. "What do you mean it doesn't matter?"

She put her hands on his shoulders and pushed him away. "Well, take your coat off," she said. "You'll catch cold."

He took off his coat and scarf and stood looking around the room. "Isn't this swell?" he asked. "Isn't it *swell*?"

The room was large. It had been the kitchen of the big brownstone house before the house was remodelled, and it had a back door that opened out onto a yard enclosed by a high wood fence, which Martin had painted blue. In the room, against one wall, was a box spring and mattress covered with soft-blue denim bound in white. Although the denim didn't muss easily, it worried Lucille Rogers when anyone sat on it, because, she said, it did muss the sheets and blankets underneath.

In front of the bed there was a coffee table with a glass tray, and on the tray there were a pottery vase filled with artificial cornflowers, a small ashtray in the shape of a heart, and a copy of the *Reader's Digest*. At the head of the bed stood a large bridge lamp with a fluted paper shade. There were two wicker chairs in the room, their cushions covered with chintz, and two straight chairs that looked as though they had once been part of a dining set. The bookcase which stood next to the door that led to the bathroom was almost empty. There were a few of Martin's books in it and some of Lucille's, and they were arranged so that some were on each shelf. The spaces between were filled with small china animals, a brass bowl, and a red-and-bronze Buddha, who held a tin plate for incense on his lap. In the exact center, on top of the bookcase, was a Baby Ben alarm clock in ivory and white, and two glass candlesticks stood at either end.

Lucille had disappeared behind the screen again. "It sure is swell," Marty said. He walked across the room and picked up his hat and put his hat, coat, and scarf in the closet. His other suit was in the closet, and six or seven dresses were arranged neatly on hangers. Marty bent his head and sniffed at them. "Smells good," he said.

He walked across the room and switched on the radio, which stood on a painted table by the window. " 'Scheherazade,' by Rimski-Korsakov," an announcer's voice said.

"I'm Rimski and you're Korsakov," Marty said to Lucille. "How are you, beautiful Korsakov?"

"You can set the table," Lucille told him.

"Yes, beautiful Korsakov," Marty said, humming with the radio. He got the bridge table from the bathroom and opened it. Then he folded the screen and set it against the wall.

"Marty!" Lucille said.

He touched her hair with one finger. "I can't see you with that screen there," he said. "No see, no set the table."

Lucille lit the broiler. "I had to get lamb chops again," she said.

Marty reached up and took a printed tablecloth and two tea napkins from the shelf over the sink. "Did you, my beautiful darling?" he asked. He spread the cloth on the table and then went to the small chest that stood between the window and the door and took out two knives, two forks, and two spoons. When he had set the table, he looked down at it. "Looks swell, doesn't it?" he asked.

"It's nice," Lucille agreed. "But I don't know."

"What don't you know, darling?" Marty asked. He went over to her and kissed the back of her neck.

"I just keep thinking that maybe we would have been better in a hotel," she said. "Without a lease. You know."

"In a hotel?" Marty repeated. "Then we wouldn't have had a place."

"I know," she said. "But with you going any minute, it might be better. I mean, it would be all right if you had your old job. You got lots of money then."

"I got lots of money now," he said. "I've got five hundred bucks and you won't have to touch that until I go. And when I go, I'll get seventy-five bucks a month until I get my commission. Why, I won't even have to pay for food or anything, so you can have the whole seventy-five bucks."

"Don't be silly," she said. "You'll have to have some money."

"Well, seventy bucks then. I don't need more than five."

She took the lamb chops from the refrigerator and stooped to open the door of the broiler. "I guess I'm just dumb," she said. "I guess I just don't know what it's all about."

The chops sizzled as she placed them on the hot grill, and smoke came out into the room. Marty put his hands under her arms and pulled her up. "Who says you're dumb? Who says so?"

She drew in the corners of her mouth. "Well," she said, "after all, you were doing defense work and you said yourself they wouldn't take you, especially since you couldn't breathe out of one side of your nose. I mean, you were perfectly all right where you were. So what I don't see is why you had to give up a good job to have your nose fixed and enlist. That's what I don't see."

"Don't you, my beautiful darling?" Marty asked.

She pulled away from him. "Oh, I wish you'd stop saying

that," she said. "You've said it every minute for six weeks. And the Navy can't want you so much. They haven't called you, have they?"

"They'll get around to it," he said. "Everything's O.K. I've got a job."

"A temporary one for twenty-five dollars." she said. "Just think—twenty-five dollars when you were making over ninety. And when you go you'll get a measly seventy-five a month."

"For a while," Marty said. "After that I'll get more."

"Not ninety a week, though," she said.

"Look at your little face," Marty said. "Look at it!"

She brushed her cheek with her hand. "What's the matter with it?" she asked.

"It's cute," he said.

She stooped again, opened the broiler door, and turned the chops. More smoke came out into the room. "Open the back door a little," she said.

He went to the door and stood looking out into the yard. The ground was hard and bare. Some wet, decaying leaves that had fallen from the ailanthus tree covered the ground, but there were no other signs that anything had ever grown there. "You know what I'm going to get you?" Marty asked. "I'm going to get you a deck chair, so later on you can lie out in the sun. I'll put in some bulbs and some grass seed and some other stuff, and you can lie out in the sun. How'll that be?"

"All right, I guess," she said.

"And in a little while now you can leave the door open all the time. I'll get a screen and a watering pot and a lot of stuff. You can fool around out there, and when you

get tired you can lie in the deck chair and drink cokes." His eyes were bright as he thought about it.

Lucille's laugh was shrill. "That sounds too divine," she said. "If you want to know what I'm going to do *really*, I'm going to get my job back if I can. You don't think I just want to sit here, do you?"

Marty turned and faced her. "Don't you like it here?" he asked. "Why, this is a cute place. And you can have your folks over and cook dinner and play bridge. I mean, you don't just have to have your folks all the time, either. You can have anybody."

"Of course I'll have anybody," she said. "That goes without saying. I don't intend to stay cooped up like a—well, like a baby."

"Of course not," Marty said. "I wouldn't expect you to."

"We can eat now," Lucille said. She took two plates from the cupboard and put a chop on each. Then she opened the oven door and took out two baked potatoes. She split them in half and spread butter over them. Marty came over and carried the plates to the table. He got the two straight chairs and stood holding hers back from the table. She took off her apron and sat down.

"Do you want bread?" she asked. "I got a coffee ring for dessert."

"No," he answered. "This is great." He handed her the salt and pepper. "I sort of thought you wouldn't want to go back to work."

"Why not?" she asked. She mashed her potato slowly with her fork.

"No reason, I guess," he said.

"It'll be more fun at the office, don't you see, Marty?"

she said. "I mean, you'll be in the Navy and when you get your commission I can wear *wings*. I mean, as long as you decided to go, I might as well have some fun out of it. Like Eloise. Her husband's somewhere in Africa, and she says that people are just as nice as can be to her, and take her out, and are sorry for her, and everything." She looked at him sharply. "Besides, I think everyone should *do* something, especially now, don't you?"

"Oh," he said. "That's what you mean." He laughed a little unsteadily. "Why, sure. You go right back when you want to. For a while there I didn't know what you meant."

"Well, I like that," she said. "What do you mean you didn't know what I meant? What did you *think*?"

"I thought there was something wrong with this place," he said. "Or how you felt. But it's O.K. now."

"I should hope so," she said, and smiled at him. She cut a piece of her chop and began to eat it daintily. "Why don't you get the news now, Marty?"

He got up and went over to the radio. "You have been listening to 'Scheherazade,' by Rimski-Korsakov," the announcer said.

Marty laughed. "Rimski-Korsakov," he said. He turned away from the radio and came over to Lucille. He buried his face in her neck. "How are you, my beautiful Korsakov?" he said. "How are you, my beautiful darling?"

He put his arms around her and kissed her quickly on her neck and on her chin. "You are my beautiful darling, aren't you, my beautiful darling?" he asked.

"I suppose so," she said.

"You don't want your job back until I go, do you?" he asked.

"Of course not, silly," she said.

"Because I like to think of you here all day," he said. "When I think about it, I can just see you here. It won't be long. I expect I'll be hearing any day now."

"Silly," she said again. "What makes you so silly?"

She put her hands under his chin, and kissed him. "Eat your dinner," she said. "And I'll tell you what! Let's go to a movie. We might as well have some fun. We don't want to stay cooped up here like an old married couple when we've only *been* married six weeks. Do we, silly?"

"Gosh, no!" he said. "Why, we're on our honeymoon. I almost forgot we were still on our honeymoon."

He went over to the radio and turned it off. "The hell with the news," he said. "And the hell with the dishes. Let's get going."

He came back to the table and began to eat hurriedly. "Sure, we'll go to the movies," he said. "And get a coke afterward. And after that we can come home again. Can't we, my beautiful Korsakov?"

They've Got to Be Funny

THE two men started talking when the train left Boston. The heavy-set, dark-haired man began the conversation. He put down his newspaper and gestured toward the headlines. "Looks bad," he said.

The other man read the headlines slowly and shook his head. "Looks worse than that," he said.

The dark man tucked the paper between his seat and the side of the car and stroked his cheek with his hand. His beard showed black under his skin. "The thing is," he said, "you can't tell which way these fellows are going to jump."

"That's it," the other agreed. "There's no rhyme or reason to it. You can't tell what that fellow Hitler's going to do. And the Italian's as slippery as they make 'em."

"Oh, him?" the dark man said scornfully. "He don't count."

The other man narrowed his eyes and pursed his lips. "Now, there's where I think you're wrong," he said. "I think you'll find he's not as dumb as he looks."

"Well, one thing's sure," the dark man said, "we've got to do something."

"We sure have."

They sat staring out of the window. It was raining and the glass was misty. The car looked new and clean and the

seats were covered with a harsh, bright-blue plush, but it smelled of wet clothes, fruit, and disinfectant. "Yes, sir," the dark man said. "We've got to do something about the British and about the Chinese." He flicked a speck of dust from the lapel of his coat. His fingernails were pink and well polished.

"Yep, the Chinese," the other man said.

The dark man smiled. "Speaking of the Chinese," he said, "reminds me of a story I heard."

The other man's eyes, which had been dull, brightened. "Yes?" he said.

"It's a little off color. I can't say I care much for off-color stories. Unless they're funny. Really funny, I mean."

"Oh, they've got to be funny," the other agreed.

"Well," the dark man said, "this one's funny. It's about the girl who was doing her daily dozen in front of the window."

The other man frowned. "I don't think I know it."

The dark man leaned toward him and lowered his voice. "Well, as I say, this girl was taking her daily dozen in front of the window, bending down to touch the floor and all that stuff, you know, and she was in the altogether. Nekkid."

"Yes?"

"I don't as a rule remember an off-color story," the dark man said. "But this one just happened to tickle me."

"I haven't heard it," the other said.

"Well, she was taking her exercises, up and down and up and down in front of the window. I forgot to say the window was open. And she went at them so hard that she lost her

balance and fell out. Well, she landed right in a big garbage can. You've seen those big cans they have?"

"Yes, I've seen them."

"Well, pretty soon along comes this Chink. That's what reminded me of the story, us talking about Chinks. And he stopped by the garbage can and looked down at the girl. Now, you'll have to excuse my Chinese lingo here. The fellow who told it to me was wonderful at it."

"That's all right," the other man said. "I never can tell a dialect story, either."

"Well, this Chink looked down at the girl," the dark man went on, "and he stood there shaking his head. And then he says, 'Velly funny. Amellican man velly funny. Velly wasteful. He throw away what Chinee man could use two months more.' "

He threw back his head and laughed. The other man laughed, too. Their faces grew red.

"Pretty good, eh?" the dark man said. His laughter changed to a cough. He took a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his lips. "Some point to that one, I think."

"Very funny," the other man said. "They've got to be funny or I don't care much about them. And, like you say, it's got some point to it." He stopped and frowned, trying to put his thoughts into words. "I mean," he said, "it sort of shows you what *they* think of *us*."

Patron of Letters

WHEN the reception room of Somers & Martin, publishers, had no people in it, it had a homelike look. Even though Leo Somers had changed his mind somewhat in the matter of interior decoration, he still felt a glow of satisfaction every time he came into it. He had furnished it during a period when Early American things seemed to him to be the height of good taste, and while he now leaned toward the modern, at least for the home, he believed that it would be hard to beat Early American for the office. There was something reassuring in the Currier & Ives prints, the hooked rug on the floor, the long maple bench with its three plaid cushions, and the parchment shades with maps on them. Along one wall was a bookcase filled with Somers & Martin books in bright jackets, and just to show that he knew people read other things, Leo Somers ordered a few magazines for the maple table.

The authors who waited there were the jarring note. They brought an air of uneasiness with them which sometimes sharpened into anxiety. They sat there, clutching bulging briefcases, smoking nervously, their eyes painful with the thoughts of what they intended to say when they got in to see Leo Somers. Occasionally there would be one with so much on his chest that he couldn't sit down at

all, but paced back and forth in the small room, scowling at the books on the shelves and despising them.

At first glance the authors seemed incredibly alike; the men usually grubby, tired, and deadly serious, and the women, for all their carefully thought-out appearance, looking as though they were about to spring. Underneath they all had a terrible excitement running through them like a fever. It was a sickening excitement that pulled the planned cheerfulness of the room apart and made it into a dreadful place where people waited.

Not that Leo Somers wasn't kind to people. He was. He made it a rule never to tell authors their work stank. He merely said it was not up to their usual standard. He had learned this kindness through a rather bitter experience: years ago he had told an author what he thought of a novel he had submitted. In describing the feelings this novel gave him, Leo did a good job; he even held his nose. And the very next year the author turned out a best-seller. Leo Somers never forgot this experience. It gave him a deep-seated kindliness toward the whole world. Once, in fact, when a rather famous author who was also something of a problem went mad at a lecture he was giving to a women's club and did a number of objectionable things, Leo Somers hadn't a word to say against him. All he said was "The poor guy's his own worst enemy." Of course, the man wasn't one of his authors.

He never refused to see people who wrote books. One by one, he worked them into the pattern of his days, between luncheon engagments, conferences, and interviews with his successful authors. And when he saw them, he gave them his attention, listened to what they had to say, and

accepted what they had to offer for a reading. If what they had to offer was impossible, he himself dictated the letters of refusal. They were wonderful letters, brief but almost tender. This sort of thing took up a great deal of his time, but his energy was boundless.

There was very little for his partner, Martin, to do. Martin had the office next to his. Although it was only slightly smaller than Leo Somers' office, it had no personality. This might be explained by the fact that before Martin there had been a long succession of partners, each occupying the office in turn, which gave it the rather hurried, impersonal look of a hotel room. Martin, for instance, had a picture of his wife and baby on his desk, but this one photograph was a pitiful thing compared to the richness of Leo Somers' collection.

All Leo's partners had two things in common: money and enthusiasm. It was sad to see them when they first bought into the firm, coming to work on time with a whole list of suggestions, calling up people and making engagements, for all the world as though they were going to stay. Their excitement when an author who was really a celebrity dropped in was pathetic. They came out of their office into the hall as eager as puppies and stood, beaming and helpful, ready to attend to business at the drop of a hat. But when the introductions were over, Leo invariably drew the celebrity into his office and closed the door. Later he would come in and offer an apology. "I hope you didn't mind our leaving you that way," he would say. "But So-and-So's an old friend of mine. Known him for years. And there was a little personal matter we had to talk over."

Gradually the partners discovered that they were only

seeing the authors of travel books or obscure political books which Leo published in the belief that they gave the firm some sort of prestige. Or they were sent out to "scout around and sound things out," the way a child is sent off to play. All Leo really asked of them was their signatures.

Although Martin had been in the firm less than two years, he already had a drained, bloodless appearance. He was like a woman who has been set up in a love nest and then left there to think things over. He sat all day long in his office, staring at the flower prints on the walls, while the life of Somers & Martin surged up to his door and then receded.

It was different for Leo. Waking every morning was an adventure. Even the prospect of breakfast in his dining room, which in a moment of madness he had had lined with dark-blue glass, couldn't dampen his spirits. He was waiting for the time when he could open the door to his offices and give a quick glance around the reception room. If there was no one there, he was almost sure to stop to talk with Miss Elgin, who sat in a sort of glass cage at her switchboard. "How'sa girl this morning?" he would say. "God, I feel lousy. I got to get some rest. Can't keep this up." And without waiting for Miss Elgin to reply, he would hurry to his own office. If, before these morning pleasantries, Miss Elgin had died and then been stuffed by an expert taxidermist, he would not have noticed. Not until he began to ring her.

As Leo Somers came into the reception room this morning, he saw there was only one man, sitting on the maple bench. The man, who was holding a bulky paper portfolio, smiled nervously at him, but Leo Somers ignored him. Later he would talk to the man like a father, but he did not

anticipate such things. He nodded to Miss Elgin and went in his own office.

The room faced south and there was a small square of sunlight on the jade-green carpet. There was warmth to the room. The walls were a soft green, monk's-cloth draperies hung at the windows, there were easy chairs, and the desk had a confused air of frivolity.

There were dozens of pictures in the room, all autographed and all of authors. The male authors were for the most part virile-looking men photographed against almost identical backgrounds of pinewoods Most of them had chosen to be pictured with their dogs, and to do them justice, they seemed to be making an honest effort to feature the dogs. Two or three were content to hold their pipes, looking quizzical, or merely healthy, depending on the sort of thing they wrote. There seemed to be no connection between these assured men and the men who sat for hours in the reception room, and one wondered just when and how the metamorphosis took place.

The women authors, the ones who sold the best, sat at desks on which rested vases of flowers. They held pens in their hands and leaned slightly forward, looking almost motherly, as befitted ladies who created several times a year. The less successful wore bangs and had a more barren appearance. A few of the women had been photographed with their children, showing that, for them, doing one thing well was not enough. It was as though they could roller-skate and play the violin at the same time. But all had found Leo Somers a dear or a darling or a swell friend and had put these sentiments in black and white.

For a while he sat at his desk assembling himself for

the arduous day, then, ringing for Miss Blake, his secretary, he plunged in. Two hours passed—two hours of dictating, telephoning, choosing the color for the cover of Somers & Martin's fall catalogue. It was a routine he knew and loved. It was after twelve when Miss Blake reëntered his office to remind him that someone was waiting to see him. "He's been waiting since before ten," she said. "He says his name's Hoffer."

Leo Somers tore himself away from dreams of a limited edition. "What's he got?" he asked.

"He won't say what he's got," Miss Blake told him. "He says it sort of has to be explained."

"If it has to be explained, it's no good."

"And," Miss Blake reminded him, "you have a luncheon engagement with Winifred Perry. She's called twice this morning to make sure you wouldn't forget. She says she's got to see you, it's important."

Leo Somers looked up slowly. A horrid suspicion had entered his mind. He thought fast and clearly and then he spoke. "Ask Mr. Martin if he would come in for a minute," he said.

Martin entered the room with a look of mild surprise on his face. It wasn't often Leo Somers sent for him.

Leo Somers' voice was pleasant. "Hello, there, Martin," he said. "Busy?"

"Not very," Martin answered.

"Well, look, my boy, it's like this," Leo Somers went on. "I'm in sort of a spot. Got myself tied up in a jam. Do you know Winifred Perry?"

"I don't think I do," Martin said.

"Well, she's a charming girl and one of our most promis-

ing authors, I think you'll agree. The fact of the matter is I made a date to take her to lunch and now I find I can't make it, and I wondered if you'd go along in my place and explain things to her."

Martin stood for a minute staring straight ahead, a rather set expression on his face. "I don't think I can make it, either," he said finally.

"What do you mean, you can't make it?" Leo Somers asked. "What have you got on? Break it. I'm asking this as a favor. I just can't possibly see the girl, much as I'd like to. I'd call it off myself, but she telephoned here this morning and said it was important. Probably has an idea for a new book she wants to discuss."

"No," said Martin. "No, I don't think she wants to discuss an idea for a new book. I think she wants some money."

Leo Somers fell back in his chair as though he'd been shot through the heart. "Money!" he gasped. "She couldn't want money! She's had all the money in advance she could possibly expect. No, no, it couldn't be money, so you go along and talk to her, like a good fellow."

"Well," Martin said, "I think she wants money."

Leo Somers sat forward in his chair. "Listen, Martin," he said. "The girl couldn't want money. She's *had* money. She couldn't want more money. Not unless she eats it. Why, do you know what type of girl Winifred Perry is? She's a very sensitive type, the kind that can live on crackers and milk and like it. She's not the type that has to have a lot of money."

"She hasn't had a lot of money," Martin said. "About eight hundred dollars in all."

"Don't you call eight hundred dollars a lot of money for

a girl like Winifred Perry?" Leo Somers asked. "I'll frankly admit *I* do. A hell of a lot of money. All she wants now is to talk about her work. I'll guarantee it. So go ahead and do this favor for me."

"No," Martin said.

Leo Somers pushed his chair back and got up. "Then I'm damned if I will!" he exclaimed. "Look, Martin, the girl has no right to talk about money. She hasn't any money coming to her. She's washed up as far as any more money is concerned. She wouldn't dare ask for any more. *God!* When I think what I've done for that girl, I know she wouldn't dare. Why, when I first brought her out nobody had ever heard of her. I admit she did a nice job on her first book, sold almost ten thousand. I was all bucked up over her. Thought I'd found something, gave her a lot of advertising, built her up. I was going to make another Julia Austen out of her."

"Jane Austen," Martin corrected.

"Then what does she do?" Leo Somers went on indignantly. "She takes a big advance and hands me a fantasy. Something nobody could make head or tail of. I published it. Sure, I published it, but I didn't like it and neither did anybody else. I ask her what it means and she tells me it's all sort of a dream that this little boy imagines."

"I rather liked it," Martin said.

"You stand alone," Leo Somers told him. "Look, Martin, just go and look at her. She's little and kind of thin and she won't talk your arm off. You can tell just by looking at her that she's a girl who won't need money. And if by any chance she does ask for some, tell her nothing doing."

"You tell her," Martin said.

"I would," Leo Somers assured him. "I would like a shot if it was anybody else. But I've been like a father to this girl. She trusts me. She's got it into her head she can come to me for anything. If I go and she does ask for money, it'll cost us something. I can't tell which way this girl is going to jump. First she gives me a good book and then she gives me this lousy fantasy. How do I know what she's going to do next? If I could count on her, well and good. She could have her money, if that's what she wants. As it is, I don't feel justified in giving her any more. So go ahead, Martin. You can talk to her impersonally. If you tell her nothing doing, there'll be no hard feelings."

"Can't make it," Martin told him.

"I'll put it this way," Leo Somers said desperately. "Here's this frail little girl who thinks I'm some kind of a god. She trusts me. She's sort of got it into her head she can come to me for anything. If I turn her down, it'll be a blow to her. It might even affect her work. She's sensitive. The type of girl who *can* write fantasies, even if they are lousy. That takes a certain type of mind, you know. So, all right. This girl has the type of mind that *thinks* in fantasies. She's already had eight hundred dollars. Good! She couldn't have spent it, not unless she ate it. Agreed? She may think she needs money and naturally she runs to me because I've been like a father to her. Tomorrow she'll forget the whole thing and if you'll go along and see her today and treat her impersonally, the whole thing will blow over and no hard feelings. I don't want to get in wrong with this girl. She gave me one good book. I don't want to get her back up. But that girl doesn't really any more need money than a—" He groped in his mind for a word. "Well, she needs some-

thing for her imagination to feed on, and you know money won't help that. She may not even know it herself, but she's the type that does better without money. There's a good fellow, Martin."

"No," Martin said. "I can't make it."

Leo Somers ran his fingers through his hair. He straightened the blue cornflower in his buttonhole and reached for his hat.

"O.K.," he said. "O.K., I'll go. It's the first favor I've asked of you and you turn me down. And I hope you'll realize that if I give in to her, it's because you can't turn a girl down when you don't know which way she's going to jump. If she gives us another lousy fantasy, I hope you'll remember that I was against seeing her today in the first place."

Without looking at Martin again, he left the room. As he entered the reception room, the man who was waiting looked up with a faint smile. But as the door slammed behind Leo Somers, the sick smile of anticipation faded from the man's face, and laying his manuscript on the cushion beside him, he settled back, prepared to wait.

Men Are All Alike

EVERYTHING she had read convinced Dorothea Crocker that marriage was a hazardous state. It was like walking a tightrope, she decided, and one misstep might prove fatal. It seemed that God had provided all men with eagle eyes and that they spent most of their time comparing their wives unfavorably with other women. Women in fiction were constantly losing their husbands because they lounged around the house in kimonos until noon, thereby providing a ghastly contrast to their husbands' secretaries, who were always brisk, neat, and efficient-looking in navy blue with white collar-and-cuff sets. Realizing that once she let herself go after she married she would be as good as gone, she doggedly set about keeping up with things and seeing to it that she was what she called "well groomed."

It was a painstaking process and required all her attention. Fortunately, on her honeymoon, her clothes were so new and carefully selected that she didn't have to do much about them and could spend at least two-thirds of her time being alert and interested in the things Charles wanted to talk about. She got off on the right foot and the morning after the wedding crept quietly out of bed to spend a conscientious forty minutes in the bathroom, making up her face, doing her hair, and even kneeling on the floor to press the wrinkles out of her tailored dressing gown with

the small portable iron she had brought with her. Then, going into the bedroom, she pulled up the shades and let the sunlight stream in. "Time to get up!" she called merrily.

Charles, seeing her standing at the foot of his bed looking so clean and fresh, had a moment of embarrassment. Except for the tailored dressing gown, she looked as she had before they were married, and he felt rumpled and slightly bawdy lying in bed in the bright sunlight. He gathered his things together and went rather furtively to the bathroom, where he made a great point of bathing, shaving, and brushing his teeth. Coming back into their room, he saw that she had dressed. "I didn't think you'd want to have breakfast *here*," she said, glancing at the unmade beds with an expression of distaste. And he hurriedly assured her that of course he didn't.

He looked around the room and decided that it was an unusually dull and unimaginative hotel room, and he was shocked to realize that he had thought it romantic last night in the soft light from the lamps. Yet that night and for many nights he was caught by the same illusion. In the daytime, walking with Dorothea, or watching her across a dinner table as she cut a small slice from a chop, laying down her knife, transferring her fork from her left hand to her right, eating slowly and without relish, he wondered how he could have dared disturb her complete niceness. And one night he switched on the bedside light so that he could see her as she slept, curious to know if she lay curled and dishevelled in the bed. She lay on her back, her arms under the covers, her hair held in place by numerous small pins, and she wakened almost immediately. "Did you want something, dear?" she asked, as brightly as though it were noon.

At first she was almost secretive about getting dressed for the day, emerging from the bathroom a complete job without allowing him a glimpse of the mechanics of the thing, but as time went on and she became expert, she sat at her dressing table and permitted him to watch her. It fascinated him for a while. Her movements were direct and capable, and she made hundreds of them. Brushing the powder from her eyelashes, she would ask, "Is there *anything* worse than seeing powder sticking to a woman's lashes? It always makes me think of Peggy Crosby. You must have noticed."

"I thought women put that black stuff on their eyes," he had told her.

She smiled. "Women may, but *ladies* don't," she said.

If she could have felt horror, the suggestion that she might not be taken for a lady would have given it to her. She had a passion for detail and she never tired of checking up on the innumerable small things that gave her assurance. Were the seams of her stockings straight? Did her bag match her shoes or her hat? Accessories were so important. Were her gloves *right*, because she had read that one can always tell a lady by her gloves. Above all, was she inconspicuous? This was her principal concern, and she achieved her desire so completely that bus conductors could never remember taking her fare and came back time after time to stand beside her, clicking their machines and saying, "Fare, please."

"There is no reason why a home should not be run as efficiently as an office," she quoted. She filled the house with labor-saving devices: electric egg beaters, an electric percolator, electric orange squeezers, patent vegetable slicers

and parers. She bought a card index for her menus, which she planned by the month, and another for recipes that she clipped from magazines and newspapers. But while her meals were charming to look at, they didn't taste very good. Her dinners were balanced and they had the flavor of a hospital tray.

Every morning, after Charles left for the office, she washed the breakfast dishes, straightened the apartment, and then sat down to read the paper. She read it without interest, but she read it. She formed no opinion, preferring, she said, to keep an open mind. "I suppose they know what they're doing," she would comment sagely. "After all, they are experienced men and we elected them. Those things take time. Rome wasn't built in a day, you know."

If a new book was praised, she got it from the lending library, and she had learned to reserve her judgment of writing she didn't quite understand or approve. "It's different, isn't it?" she would ask. Modern art and new methods of interior decoration were "odd," and she avoided exposing herself to them as much as possible. Her ideas of what was good taste and what was bad taste were definite. She had a mental catalogue of things that were permissible and safe: Duncan Phyfe, Early American, broadloom carpets, white picture frames, flower prints, wine tasters to be used as ashtrays, chenille, hooked rugs, wild rice, Lloyd Douglas, foreign films, James Hilton, dropped living rooms, dining foyers, colored ice cubes, Westchester County, really good suits, and black lace dinner dresses. She was an admirable mixture of culture and caution.

From the beginning she had concentrated on being a companion to Charles, and if there were times when he

didn't want a companion, she was not aware of them. She did not play golf, but on their vacations she walked miles around golf courses with him, calling out "Good shot" or "Oh, too bad" at every stroke he made. She divided all talk into two classes: the conversations you had with men and the conversations you had with women. With men, she discussed foreign affairs, Wall Street, or sports, reserving the more delicate choice of literature, art, the theatre, and clothes for the ladies, who, she felt, were more intelligent.

In the five years of their marriage, the Crockers had never been separated until, after she had had a severe attack of bronchitis, Charles insisted on sending her to the country for two weeks, to recuperate. She stood it for ten days and then took the train back to New York. It was almost six when she arrived at the apartment. The Venetian blinds in the living room were drawn as she had left them, but in the bedroom Charles' bed was unmade, his clothes were scattered over the chairs, and from the bathroom she heard the sound of the shower running. She tapped lightly on the door and, getting no answer, she opened it and called "Charles!"

He turned off the shower. "For the love of Pete, Dorothea!" he said. "What are you doing home?"

"Surprise! Surprise!" Her voice sounded merry, but her face was expressionless and her eyes moved quickly from the pool of water on the bathroom floor to the heap of soggy bath towels and the half-finished Scotch-and-soda on the glass shelf over the washbasin. "My," she exclaimed, "don't we look gay!"

Then, seeing he was about to step out of the tub, she closed the door discreetly and began unpacking her bag.

In a few minutes he appeared, glass in hand. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Do you feel sick or something?"

She folded a nightgown and laid it on top of a neat pile before she answered. "Never felt better. I just decided to come home, that's all."

"You might have wired or something," he said. "I mean I could have met you."

"Silly! As though I couldn't get home all the way from Grand Central by my lonesome!"

He took a sip of his drink and stood looking at her uneasily. "The fact is," he said, "I have sort of a date for dinner with this guy. A guy from the office. And I don't know how to get in touch with him to call it off."

"Why call it off on my account?" she asked brightly. "I'd love to meet this *guy* from your office. What's his name?"

"Conk Harris," he told her. "You might not like him, though—he's kind of crude."

"Oh," she said.

"Kind of crazy, too," he added hopefully.

She straightened her shoulders and lifted her head as though she were expecting a blow on the chin. "Well," she said, "he must have something fine in him or you wouldn't care to spend an evening with him, I'm sure. I'm always glad to meet your friends."

He finished his drink. "Don't say I didn't warn you," he told her. "And you'd better step on it, because I'm late now."

"Where are you meeting him?" she asked.

"At this Spanish place. A place called El Toro. Down in the Village."

"Oh, a Spanish place," she repeated, and there was a

note of relief in her voice. "What sort of Spanish place? I mean where were their sympathies?"

He laughed shortly. "You have me there," he said.

She took off her dress and began to fix her face hurriedly. She knew that one must never keep a husband waiting. "Some Spanish places are charming," she told him. "Lovely patios and pottery."

"This place hasn't got a patio," he said.

They took a taxi to El Toro. It was a dreary-looking place from the outside, with a false front painted orange and yellow, a picture of a bull in electric lights, and a shabby doorman in a toreador costume. It was in a basement, and the stairs were covered with dusty black carpet. The place smelled of a rather sickly deodorizer, cheap perfume, and cooking, and the captain, after a sharp glance at Dorothea, bowed politely. "Good evening, Mr. Cooper," he said. Charles glanced sharply at his wife in embarrassment.

"How is Mr. Cooper this evening?" the captain said. "Conchita, take Mr. Cooper's hat."

He took the hat check from the girl himself and handed it to Charles. "Your friend's waiting for you," he went on. "I gave you the best table in the house. Right on the dance floor."

The room was only partly filled. A few couples sat in dimly lighted booths around the walls, and the tables near the dance floor were taken. The orchestra was playing a tango. The captain led them to a table where a large, red-faced man sat alone, and pulled out a chair for Dorothea with a flourish.

Conk Harris rose. "Well, well," he called loudly and amiably. "What have we here?"

Charles Crocker's eyes seemed to hold a warning. "Conk," he said, "I'd like you to meet Mrs. Crocker. Dorothea, this is Conk Harris."

Dorothea held out a hand in an immaculate white glove and spoke in such a low, cultured voice that she could scarcely be heard above the orchestra. "It's so nice meeting one of Charles' friends."

The smile on Conk Harris's face became fixed. "Say, this is great!" he exclaimed. "A pleasant surprise."

Dorothea sat down, smoothing her dress carefully under her. "Charles," she said, "the maître d'hôtel called you Mr. *Cooper*."

"Oh, he's just one of these foreigners," Charles explained, and flushed.

Conk Harris hitched his chair closer to the table. "Well, what'll it be?" he asked.

"Oh, really, I don't think I care for anything," Dorothea told him. "A little Cointreau later with my coffee, perhaps."

"Here, now," Conk Harris said, "have a little something. Good for what ails you."

"Pardon?" she asked.

"I said it's good for what ails you," he repeated. "What'll it be? A Martini? A Cuba Libre?"

"I'll tell you what," she said gaily, "I'll have whatever you boys are having." She smiled at them bravely.

They ordered their drinks and the waiter brought the menu. It was spotted and dirty, and the printing was so dim that it was almost impossible to read. Dorothea took off her gloves. "Now then," she said.

"Better take the regular dinner," Charles cautioned her. "It's not bad. I can't vouch for anything else."

She held the menu close to her eyes, studying the strange names. "I'm not very hungry," she said finally. Remembering that one must give her order to her escort, she stared fixedly at Charles. "I'll have a clear soup—consommé, if they have it—and a lamb chop with a piece of grilled pineapple, and a plain salad."

The waiter bent down. "I didn't get it, lady," he said. "You'll have to come again."

She kept on looking at Charles and raised her eyebrows slightly. He cleared his throat. "I don't know as they have any of those things, Dorothea," he told her. "I think you'd just better have the regular dinner."

For a moment her lips set, and then she smiled again. "When in Rome," she said. "You order for me." She turned to Conk Harris. "It's not that I'm fussy, it's just that foreign cooking seems—well, rather fantastic in this day and age. All those proteins and starches."

Conk Harris laughed. "It hasn't killed Charlie here."

She sat back in her chair and folded her hands in her lap. There were a few couples dancing awkwardly, intent on their steps, the men holding tightly to their partners, so that the women's dresses hiked up in back. The walls were decorated with scenes of bullfights and there was a balcony in the center of each wall, covered with artificial flowers.

"It does look very *Spanish*, doesn't it?" she asked. "Wasn't it a pity, Mr. Harris? About Spain, I mean. Just what did *you* think of it all?"

"Sure was a shame," he agreed. He looked at his watch. "Almost eight. Time for the floor show."

"Oh, that will be nice," Dorothea said. "I wonder if you happened to see La Argentinita when she was in New

York. You remember her, Charles. She danced at Town Hall with just a piano. But she was fascinating. We enjoyed her so much."

"This show isn't exactly like that," Charles explained. "It's more Cuban than Spanish, wouldn't you say, Conk?"

"Of course," Dorothea put in quickly and with understanding. "How stupid of me. It's due to the mess over there, no doubt."

The lights grew dim and the music stopped.

"Here she is," Conk Harris said. "On the dot." He turned his chair so that he sat facing the dance floor. The orchestra started a rumba and a spotlight was focused on black velvet curtains to the right of the platform. Dorothea, glancing at Charles' face, stiffened. He held his drink in his hand and his eyes were filled with anticipation.

Through the curtains, Dorothea first saw a swirl of ruffles and then a girl danced out onto the floor. She was small and round. Her skirt, which was short in front, trailed in back, and the underside, where it swept the ground, was gray with dirt. Her breasts were covered, but her stomach and back were bare, and the skin of her body had the color and consistency of coffee ice cream. Her face was powdered a dead white, the powder ending abruptly at her chin, which made her look as though she were wearing an impudent mask. She lifted her skirts and Dorothea saw that the pits of her knees were a sooty black. Although the tempo of the music was fast and her feet moved quickly, her body seemed to follow a slower beat. She danced around the floor close to the tables, and she smiled as her eyes separated the two men from Dorothea, ignoring her. Dorothea noticed that her neck looked dirty and that her

hair was thick and shiny with brilliantine. The whole room smelled of her—a strong, heavy scent of mingled perfumes.

Dorothea looked down at her plate, but from the corner of her eye she could still see a whirl of strident pink ruffles. She began to eat her soup, which was lukewarm and greasy, holding the heavy spoon daintily. She noticed that the waiter had brought Charles a fresh drink and she took a sip of her own. It seemed as though the girl had been dancing for hours.

Suddenly there was a burst of applause, and the girl was standing by the black velvet curtains, bowing. Conk Harris was clapping vigorously, but Charles sat staring at her without moving until the curtains closed behind her.

The rest of the show didn't amount to much. They watched it dully while they ate. When the lights went on again, the men were silent. "Did you like her?" Conk Harris asked finally.

"Who? Oh, the little girl," Dorothea said. "She was very dark for a Spaniard, wasn't she? She looked—well, she looked almost as though she might have some Negro blood, didn't you think?"

She sat straighter. "Tell me, Mr. Harris," she went on, "just what do you do at the office? It's Charles' second home, really, and naturally I'm interested."

It was almost an hour later when Charles suggested that they ought to be going. "Can we drop you somewhere?" he asked Conk Harris. But Conk said he thought he'd sit around a while and wait for the second show.

"You must have dinner with us some night," Dorothea said. "Tonight was rather an upset with my coming home and not having time to organize. You should see the place!"

She patted Charles possessively and reprovingly on the arm. "Men are all alike. They need a woman to look out after them."

In the taxi she discovered she had lost one of her gloves, and when Charles suggested they go back for it, she lied. "I am almost positive I had it when we left," she said. "I must have dropped it when we walked to Sixth Avenue to find a cab."

Even with the dust and Charles' clothes all over the place, the apartment looked lovely. She took off her hat and began to make his bed. "That was an odd sort of place, wasn't it?" she asked. "Quite foreign. I think such places are so interesting to visit once in a while, although I don't think I'd care to make a habit of it."

When she had straightened the room, she began to get ready for bed. She could hear Charles moving restlessly about the living room, and for an instant she thought of calling to him. But habit was strong in her, and she sat down at her dressing table and went through the familiar motions of fixing herself for the night. Going to the closet, she started to take out her tailored house coat, but some instinct made her reach for a negligee that she had once bought and never worn because the frills on the sleeves annoyed her. She put it on and loosened the pins a little in the front of her hair. They still held her hair in place, but it looked softer and not so stiff.

In the living room, Charles had stopped wandering about and was reading the paper. She sat down on the arm of his chair and pulled her negligee up slightly, so that it wouldn't touch the dusty rug. "You haven't told me you are glad to see me," she said.

International Plot

MRS. PARSONS lowered her voice slightly and spoke into the telephone. "Well, I tell you," she said, "even if Mark doesn't feel like going out, *I* may run over. You know how he is about going anywhere on Sunday. If it's all right. *You* know. I'm wild to see it and I'll come if I can."

She hung the receiver on its hook and went back into the dining room. "That was Anita," she said.

Her husband was peeling an apple, and when he had finished he quartered it and spread the pieces with creamy Camembert cheese. "Anita?" he asked finally. "What's she up to?"

"Her new whatnot came yesterday, and she says it's just right. Doesn't stick out too far and fits into the corner perfectly," Mrs. Parsons answered. "I tell you what, suppose you get dressed and we'll go over for a little while. You haven't been out all day, and it's lovely out, really. Nice and crisp. I imagine they'll be home; she didn't say anything about going anywhere."

Mr. Parsons put a bit of apple into his mouth. "Did you tell her we'd be over?"

"Not exactly," Mrs. Parsons said. "As a matter of fact, I told her that I didn't think you felt much like getting dressed."

"You go ahead," her husband told her.

"Well—" She stood up and began to scrape some nutshells from her plate onto a small butter dish. It was only a gesture.

"Go ahead," he repeated.

"Well, leave the dishes then, and I'll do them when I get back," she said.

She went into the bedroom and hurriedly put on her hat and coat. "Sure you don't want to come?" she called.

"God, no!" Mr. Parsons said under his breath. "Don't believe I will," he answered loudly.

He finished his apple, drank the rest of his coffee, and lighted a cigarette. Mrs. Parsons came into the dining room and bent over to kiss him good-bye. His hair was mussed and the bald spot on the top of his head showed. Now that she was ready to leave him, he began to look pathetic and lonely, and she wondered what he would do all evening by himself. "You wouldn't rather I stayed?" she asked.

"No. Go ahead."

She glanced around the table at the used dishes. "Be sure and leave them now," she said. "I don't mind a bit."

She smoothed his hair and kissed him again. "I won't be long."

At the door, she turned. Seeing him sitting alone at the head of the table, she was reminded sharply of a picture that had been popular when she was a child. It showed an old man, John D. Rockefeller, perhaps, sitting in lonely splendor at a large, handsome table. Before him was a bowl of milk and crackers, and there was an untouched turkey somewhere in the offing. The caption read, "Backward,

turn backward, O time, in your flight. Make me a child again just for tonight."

For a minute she stood undecided in the doorway. "Charlie McCarthy's on at eight," she said.

"Don't worry about *me*," he told her, and smiled.

"Good-bye, darling. I'll hurry," she said.

"Good-bye. Say hello to Anita and Bob for me."

He sat still until he heard the door close, and then he got up and carried his plate to the kitchen. He wore a dark-blue bathrobe made of some sort of towelling over his pajamas, and had on a pair of shabby mules that slapped the floor as he walked. He had had a perfect Sunday. He had read the *Times* and the *Herald Tribune* all day, and he had clipped articles that struck him as having special interest and laid them in his bureau drawer on top of his clean shirts. The drawer held more clippings than shirts, and someday he intended to paste them in a scrapbook. The scrapbook, he felt, would be valuable someday. He had saved pictures from *Life* and from the rotogravure sections of the Sunday papers, and dozens of stories by newspaper columnists and war correspondents. On some of these items, principally those by Miss Dorothy Thompson, he had pencilled a question mark, which meant that he did not agree wholeheartedly with the writer. On others he had underlined what he considered to be vital paragraphs. In the bookshelves in the bedroom he kept "Inside Europe," "Inside Asia," two books by Winston Churchill, and two books about the battle of Jutland. Mrs. Parsons understood that these were not to be touched.

In the kitchen he scraped the apple peelings from his plate into the garbage pail. Then he washed the dish under

running water, dried it, and put it away. The Russians, he thought, were not to be trusted, and he was damned if he knew what they had up their sleeve. He shuffled back into the dining room, picked up his cup and saucer, washed and dried them, and was just about to put them away when an idea struck him. It was possible that there was more to the whole business than met the eye or could be gleaned from the newspapers. He laid the saucer on its pile and hung the cup on a small brass hook. On his way back to the table, one mule caught in the rug and came off. He stooped down and put it on again without noticing. The British were smart. Damned smart. They were the cleverest diplomats in the world. And it burned him up to hear people say they were stupid and to claim that they had pulled boners when they let Hitler get away with that stuff in Czechoslovakia. Granted that it looked funny on the surface, there must be more to it.

He carried a butter knife to the kitchen. His mind was working furiously. He washed and dried the butter knife, polishing it until it shone. It seemed to him that some hidden explanation lay in the back of his mind waiting to be uncovered. Something that, if he could only discover it, would be intricate and satisfying. He thought back to the beginning, to Austria, and proceeded methodically through the series of events that led to war's being declared. Reviewing the facts coldly and reasonably as he washed a glass, he was forced to admit that the British didn't look so good. That, he believed, was their strength—to play dumb and finally outsmart everybody. Look what they had done in the World War, swinging this country right over to their side.

Back and forth he went from kitchen to dining room, carrying one dish or one piece of silver at a time. He had just picked up the last plate that remained on the table when something happened in the dark place in his mind. It was flooded with light and he thought that he had hit on the secret.

Filled with excitement, he hurried back to the kitchen with the plate. It was possible that England and Russia had an agreement. A very secret agreement. Sure, Russia had signed a paper with Germany, and what did it amount to? Not a damned thing! Because under, far under, that pact was another, a diabolically clever one, with Germany as the cat's-paw. And in the end Russia, France, and England would have Germany at their mercy. His mind, aflame with this idea, was not concerned with the technical details of how this was to be accomplished. He considered Finland, and dismissed it with the thought that there was more there than anyone would ever know—a bit of side strategy too deep for him. The basic soundness of the plot was still there. Russia had openly denounced Nazism in the past. It was beyond all reason that she should ally herself with Germany, and yet she had. Why? Because underneath that alliance lay another, one with England.

He put the plate on the shelf and looked at the stove, which was littered with pans. He opened the oven door and hid them away. Turning out the light in the kitchen, he went into the bedroom and opened his bureau drawer. He spread the clippings out on the bed, found a pencil and a notebook, and wrote, "Possibilities of an Anglo-Russian Pact—1."

He wondered if, when he had worked out the details,

he had better mention his theory to anyone. Get in touch with one of the papers, maybe, and tell them his conclusions. After some thought he decided against it, remembering the havoc that had been caused by the leaking out of news of the separate peace between Russia and Germany in the last war. He preferred not to have any suicides at his door.

He was still busy when Mrs. Parsons came home, and, hearing the front door open, he went to the hall to meet her. "I wish you had come with me," she said, kissing him. "The house looks lovely with the new whatnot. She has her spice apple on it, and the little tortoiseshell box, and all her darling things. They really show now."

Her cheeks were cold and her coat smelled of the outdoors. She went into the dining room and gave a quick glance around. "You did them!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "You shouldn't have!"

She whisked off the tablecloth, put it away in the table drawer, and got out a lace square, which she placed in the middle of the table. On the square she set a bowl of fruit.

"Now then," she said briskly, following him back into the bedroom, "what have you been doing?"

She looked at the bed and saw that he had arranged his things all over the white chenille spread. "Why, darling," she said, "you found something to do after all."

She caught his arm and pressed her face against the rough blue towelling of his bathrobe. "I'm glad," she said.

Quite a Boy

IT WAS half past six in the evening, and people were standing three deep at the bar. Harry Cummings cast an experienced eye around the room and turned to his companion, a small, intelligent-looking man whose eyes shone expectantly behind octagonal glasses. "Better get a table now," Mr. Cummings said. "No use trying to get served at the bar."

"Anything you say," George Weaver answered. He shifted the briefcase he carried under his arm and moved forward.

The bar ran along one wall, and at a reasonable distance in front of it were a dozen small tables covered with red-and-white checked cloths. The noise was deafening and the air was thick with smoke.

Harry Cummings pushed through the crowd at the bar, followed by Mr. Weaver, and walked to a table at the end of the room. He sat down on a bench that ran along the wall, so that he faced the door. "How's this?" he asked.

Mr. Weaver laid his briefcase carefully on the table and took a chair to the left of Mr. Cummings, where he would be able to see the people who were standing at the bar. "This is great," he said. "Nice of you to bring me here. I've heard a lot about this place, but I never had the opportunity of coming here before."

Harry Cummings laughed tolerantly. "Oh, it's not bad. Good food, too. What'll it be?"

"Scotch-and-soda would be about right," Mr. Weaver said.

Mr. Cummings snapped his fingers for a waiter. "Two Scotch-and-sodas." He leaned back on the leather cushions along the wall. He was a large man, and his fair, thin skin was pulled tightly over the flesh of his face.

Mr. Weaver fingered the catch of his briefcase. "I've got all the figures here. And I'd like to explain them in detail before you take them."

"Time enough for that. We'll have some dinner first."

The waiter brought their drinks. Mr. Cummings drank almost half of his, then suddenly put his glass down. "Well, by God!" he said. "There's John Bowie! The big fellow at the end there. Ever heard of Bowie?"

Mr. Weaver said he hadn't. He looked toward the end of the bar and saw a tall, broad-shouldered man with a shock of black hair that seemed to be growing in all directions.

"You must have heard of Bowie," Mr. Cummings said. "The newspaper chap. Been all over the world, and can he tell you things that would make your hair curl! Best story-teller I ever listened to. I'll go and get him to come over."

He edged out from behind the table and walked over to where John Bowie stood at the bar. Mr. Weaver could hear Bowie's shout of joy above all the other voices in the room, and as Bowie turned he got a better look at his face. It was a rugged face and looked as though it might more appropriately stand out from the side of a mountain than

be attached to a man's body. Mr. Weaver had seen something like it once while summering in the White Mountains. "See that peak over there?" he had been told. "Well, if you look at it from the right angle, it looks just like a man's face. That big rock is the chin and there's a clump of trees that makes the nose. You can't see it very well today, but on a clear day it's a perfect face."

Bowie wore a loose-fitting tweed suit and a thick homespun tie of bright orange. He gestured as he talked, and from time to time he hit Mr. Cummings on the back. Mr. Weaver saw that Cummings now had another drink in his hand, and he picked up his own glass and took a large swallow.

In a few minutes Mr. Cummings came back to the table and sat down. "He's quite a boy!" he said happily. "Be over in a few minutes, as soon as he gets rid of the people he's with. That boy's lived, I tell you. Been in every country you can name. He's just back now from China and Japan and is on his way to the other side."

"Sounds like an interesting character all right," Mr. Weaver said. He felt hungry, and pleasantly warm from his drink.

"Well, shall we order?" Mr. Cummings picked up the menu and handed it to Mr. Weaver, and the two men gave their orders.

While they were waiting, Mr. Cummings glanced toward John Bowie several times, and finally he got up again. "I'll just pop over and see what's keeping him," he said.

Mr. Weaver watched his friend as he stood with his arm around John Bowie's shoulders. Bowie's huge face was flushed and his laugh was a gusty roar. He called to the bar-

tender and ordered a drink for Harry Cummings, but Mr. Cummings shook his head when the drink was served. Bowie slid Mr. Cummings' glass in front of himself, finished his own drink, and had almost finished the other before Mr. Cummings got away.

"He'll be right with us," Mr. Cummings said as he returned to the table. He looked at Mr. Weaver's soup, which had grown quite cold. "No need for you to have waited for me."

"I thought we might finish up with dinner and get at the figures before your traintime," Mr. Weaver said.

"Plenty of time," Mr. Cummings assured him, and started on his shrimp cocktail.

When Mr. Cummings had taken a bite or two of his filet mignon, he looked toward the bar anxiously. "Can't imagine what's keeping Bowie," he said. "If you don't mind, I'll just pop over and ask."

Mr. Weaver went on eating his steak, and he had finished it and was starting in on a large peach tart when Mr. Cummings came back to the table. "He's coming right over," Mr. Cummings said. "Probably got some dope on the way things are in Japan that'll make your hair stand on end."

A young man and a pretty girl sat down at the next table, and Mr. Weaver watched her with mild, impersonal pleasure as she slid out of her coat. He finished his tart and dropped three lumps of sugar in a large cup of coffee.

"I took Bowie to a banquet once. Well, sir, they had a bunch of entertainers, a girl show, and a blues singer, but I want to tell you that Bowie was the life of that party. I give you my word that he had every man there sitting on

the edge of his chair. They were all big executives, too. And Bowie had them right in the palm of his hand." Mr. Cummings' voice held a note of awe. "Damnedest thing I ever saw."

"I can see that he is a very vital person," Mr. Weaver said.

"Vital! He's got more push to him than ten men." Mr. Cummings looked up, and his expression was ecstatic. "Here he comes! Here comes the boy now!" Mr. Bowie seemed to be having some trouble finding his way through the people at the bar. When he made their table, he knocked against it, and Mr. Weaver's glass of water turned over on the cloth. "Here, here!" Mr. Cummings cried. "Look where you're going, big boy."

"Quite," John Bowie said.

"John, I'd like you to meet George Weaver here. I've been telling him about you."

Mr. Weaver stood up to shake hands, but Bowie, occupied with arranging himself on the bench beside Harry Cummings, paid no attention to him.

"Well, boy, open up," Mr. Cummings said. "Tell us what you know."

" 'Svery fine," John Bowie said. " 'Svery fine indeed. What'll it be?" He leaned toward the pretty young girl who sat at his left. "Make mine the same."

Mr. Cummings glanced at him nervously. "Move over here, boy," he said. "Plenty of room."

Mr. Bowie's list to the left was pronounced. "With plain water. None of your god-damned soda, you hear?"

Mr. Weaver leaned forward politely. "Cummings tells

me you've just come back from China and Japan. You must have had some interesting experiences."

"Boats!" John Bowie said. "I don't like boats. Very, very bad."

"What boat were you on?" Mr. Weaver asked.

"Boats."

"I wouldn't mind taking a trip myself about now," Mr. Cummings said. "I haven't been on a boat for three years."

"Up and down. Up and down," John Bowie said. " 'Senough to drive you crazy."

Mr. Weaver noticed with some apprehension that the young girl was leaning as far away from Mr. Bowie as she could and that Bowie's left hand seemed to be reaching far below the table. "I think," he said to Mr. Cummings, "that Mr. Bowie is crowding that young lady."

Mr. Bowie leered at him craftily and put both hands on the table. "Plenty of room," he said.

Mr. Weaver and Mr. Cummings sat wrapped in an uncomfortable silence. Finally Mr. Cummings spoke. "I think your friends are looking for you, boy."

"To hell with them." Mr. Bowie's head dropped on his chest and his hand disappeared underneath the table.

"I really think," Mr. Weaver began.

Mr. Cummings stood up and sighed. "I guess you're right," he said. "I'll see what I can do."

Mr. Weaver watched him as he approached the head-waiter, and he saw that money was changing hands.

In a few minutes Mr. Cummings came back and sat down heavily. "Burns the candle at both ends," he said.

"Of course," Mr. Weaver agreed.

"It can't be done, you know," Mr. Cummings said. "Bound to catch up with you."

"That's right," Mr. Weaver said.

The headwaiter approached their table and, leaning over, put his arm around Mr. Bowie's shoulders. It was an almost affectionate gesture. "Mr. Bowie," he said. "Mr. Bowie, sir! There's a telephone call for you in the booth in the hall."

Bowie lifted his head. "What say?"

"A telephone call," the headwaiter repeated. "A very important call, Mr. Bowie. Right this way." He hooked his arm expertly under Mr. Bowie's and brought him to his feet.

Mr. Weaver and Mr. Cummings watched them as they made their way across the room, through the door, past the telephone booth, and toward the exit. The hat-check girl appeared miraculously with Mr. Bowie's hat and coat, and outside by the curb a taxi was waiting, its door opened wide.

Seaman First Class

THE Chatfields' house in Monroe, Connecticut, stood on a bluff overlooking Long Island Sound. It had once been a summer cottage, but when Mr. Chatfield retired it had been remodelled into what was known as an all-year-round house. That meant that it had a cellar, an oil burner, storm windows, and was plastered throughout. Like most of the houses near the shore in Monroe, it had a slightly nautical look from the outside; there were a red and a green ship's lantern on either side of the front door and a weather-vane in the shape of a three-masted schooner over the garage. Also on the front door, hanging from the doorknob, was a string of bells that had nothing to do with the sea. They had been brought from Portugal and they looked like cowbells. Mrs. Chatfield had put them there so that she could hear when Mrs. Shelton popped in unannounced. Mrs. Chatfield had been talking about Mrs. Shelton one Sunday afternoon when the radio was tuned in to the Philharmonic, and she hadn't heard the door open. There had been a decided coolness between the two ladies for some time.

When war was declared, the Chatfields went right into it. Mrs. Chatfield made blackout curtains for the sun porch and talked about getting a job in an airplane factory in Hartford, while Mr. Chatfield signed up as an airplane-

spotter and took the meanest watches. And when the rationing began, Mrs. Chatfield used saccharine in her tea and coffee; Mr. Chatfield pasted an A sticker on the windshield of his Buick and filled out his fuel-oil application so conscientiously that he forgot to allow for the kitchen and the sun porch. Even Nellie, the Chatfields' maid, left to work in the factory in Clinton. Mrs. Chatfield decided against trying to get another maid. She explained to her friends that by doing her own housework she was releasing a worker for war industry.

During the early fall of 1942 there were rumors of a complete blackout, which were pleasantly exciting, but as the fall passed and winter settled down, the blackout became a dimout, the airplane-spotters were moved from the bleak height of Janner's Hill to the roof of the school, and it seemed that there was nothing more to do for the war effort. Of course, sitting in the house with the thermostat down to sixty and marketing only once a week on account of the gasoline shortage was something, but it was not, Mrs. Chatfield thought, as though one could say, "Connecticut can take it!" It was not enough, and she talked wistfully of bombs until the day Mrs. Shelton told her about the wonderful thing the ladies of Essex were doing. "They are taking British sailors," Mrs. Shelton said.

"British sailors?" Mrs. Chatfield repeated. "What for?"

"My dear," Mrs. Shelton said, "they've been bombed and everything. And they send them to hospitals, and when they get out of the hospitals, why, naturally, they have to have someplace to go to rest before they're sent home or something."

"How marvellous!" Mrs. Chatfield said. "Did you hear that, Harry? They've been bombed and bombed."

Mr. Chatfield, who was Harvard '97, said, "Poor beggars!"

"I'd like one," Mrs. Chatfield said. "I'd like one right out of the hospital. We could pick him up at the station, bundle him into the car, and put him right to bed when he got here."

"One funny thing—at least *I* think so—is that you're not supposed to give them any medication whatsoever," Mrs. Shelton said. "It's all been attended to."

"As to that," Mrs. Chatfield said coldly, "I would prefer to use my own judgment. I certainly raised a healthy boy when I raised Robert. And both Robert and his wife trust me implicitly with the two children."

Mrs. Shelton glanced at the spot on the carpet where Jody had thrown up the last time he had spent the afternoon with his grandmother, and said nothing.

"I'm going to ask for one," Mrs. Chatfield said. "We can put him in the guest room upstairs if the stairs won't be too much. Or we can put him in Nellie's old room off the kitchen, which is really warmer."

"I'd like to take one, too," Mrs. Shelton said. "But my house is freezing. Besides, I'm all alone, and I don't think I'm well enough to shoulder the responsibility."

"What do you think, Harry?" Mrs. Chatfield asked. "Where do I get one, Edith?"

"You just call Mrs. Bromley in Essex," Mrs. Shelton said. "You know her. She's English, or Canadian. She had the British booth at the fair last summer."

In less than ten minutes Mrs. Chatfield had made ar-

rangements with Mrs. Bromley to take the next British seaman who needed a rest.

The following morning Mrs. Chatfield was still in bed when the telephone rang. The room was bitterly cold, and she shuddered as she reached out to pick up the receiver. It was Mrs. Bromley, who, from the tone of her voice, had been up for hours. "Well," Mrs. Bromley said enthusiastically, "I have one for you. A very nice one, so they tell me. He's had a slight throat operation, and he'll be in Monroe this evening on the six-o'clock train. You'll know him by his uniform."

"How wonderful!" Mrs. Chatfield said. "And thanks loads. We did so want to do something."

She said good-bye and crawled out of bed. Harry was up and downstairs, and Mrs. Chatfield opened the door to the hall and sniffed to see if he had put on the coffee. Then she put her dark-red chenille dressing gown on over her flannelette nightgown, slipped her feet into fleece-lined slippers, and went down the stairs.

Harry was sitting at the table in the breakfast nook, off the kitchen, eating his cereal. "You can't just sit there," Mrs. Chatfield said. "We've got to fix the house. We're getting a wounded sailor on the six-o'clock train."

"*Today?*" Mr. Chatfield asked.

"Today," she answered firmly.

Mr. Chatfield started to say something then thought better of it. "Right," he said, and finished his cereal hurriedly.

The Chatfields and Rudy Wilkins, who drove the express truck, were the only people at the station to meet the six-o'clock train. It was dark and cold and the wind blew the

cinders from the side of the tracks. Mr. Chatfield stamped his feet on the wooden platform until they tingled. Over his arm he carried a woollen lap robe. Mrs. Chatfield looked around and sighed. "It's a pity he couldn't see the place in summer," she said. "It's really a charming little place in summer."

"Poor beggar's probably too done in to care," Mr. Chatfield said. "Probably just wants to crawl in somewhere and rest."

"Well, I've broth, and he can have some nice thin toast if his throat isn't too sore," his wife said. "I hope the hot-water bottle hasn't leaked in his bed." She stared up the tracks. "I think I hear it," she said.

They could see the headlight of the train as it rounded the curve. "I'll stay here," Mrs. Chatfield said. "And you go on ahead. We can't have him standing around."

The train pulled into the station and stopped abruptly. Mrs. Chatfield stepped back and looked along the platform. After a few seconds she saw Harry ahead and saw that he had someone in uniform with him. As they walked under the dim lights of the station, she saw that the man with Harry was small and round. He walked briskly and Harry was having a hard time keeping pace with him. Mrs. Chatfield went forward to greet him. "Here I am!" she called cheerily. "I was just saying it was a pity you couldn't see the place in summer."

She put out her hand, and the round little man shook it warmly. "Earl Hurley's the name, Ma'am," he said. "Bit of a twister, what?" His voice was slightly husky, his face was pink, and his fine blond hair fell over his forehead. He had a dimple in his chin and when he smiled two dim-

ples appeared in his cheeks. He looked like a smaller and gayer edition of Charles Laughton.

"Well, Mr. Hurley," Mrs. Chatfield said.

"Call me Earl," he said. "I'm a family man." He nodded at her brightly.

"Goodness!" Mrs. Chatfield said. "What are we thinking of? Letting you stand out here in the cold. Harry, take his bag."

"Nonsense, Ma'am," he said, holding onto the bag firmly. They walked to the car and Earl Hurley took the rug from Mr. Chatfield's arm and arranged it carefully over Mrs. Chatfield's knees as she sat down. Mr. Chatfield stepped on the starter and they drove away along the dim streets.

As they came into the living room of the house, Mrs. Chatfield turned and looked at Earl Hurley again. She thought of the broth keeping hot in the double boiler on the electric stove and of the bed, with its clean sheets turned down to receive a sick man. "You see," she said, "we weren't sure. We thought you might be—might want to go to your room—go to bed, I mean."

"Not me," he said. "I'm fit as a fiddle." He patted his throat with a plump, short hand. "Little trouble with my throat."

"We've put you," Mrs. Chatfield said nervously, "in the room off the kitchen. It's warmer. It's really dreadfully cold upstairs."

"Right," he said. He followed her through the dining room to the kitchen, glancing at the stove as he passed. "Right," he said again as he saw the small, pretty room, with its gay chintz curtains. Then he closed the door.

Mrs. Chatfield hurried back to the living room, where

she found her husband putting another log on the fire. "Harry," she said, "what are we going to do? I mean we've got to think of something. It will be so dull for him here. And I think he wants dinner. A regular dinner."

"So do I," Mr. Chatfield said. "What were *we* going to have?"

"I hadn't thought." Mrs. Chatfield sank down on the couch and stared at the fire. "I thought just eggs or some little thing after we got him to bed. I must say I think Mrs. Bromley might have told me." She sat silent for a moment. "Tea, of course," she said. "And a lot of bacon and eggs. And there's fruit and some cookies, and canned beans, and baked potatoes. We can call Edith, too, and the Mastens, and Dr. and Mrs. Carley, and the Ryan girls to drop in after dinner. Make it sort of gay."

"I'll light the oven," Mr. Chatfield said.

Mrs. Chatfield was busy telephoning for fifteen minutes before she went to the kitchen and began opening cans. When she had the beans in the casserole, Earl came out of his room. He had taken a shower and his blond hair was damp. He looked scrubbed and clean. "Here I am," he said. "Ready to pitch in."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Chatfield said. "You sit right there and rest." She pointed to the rocking chair in the corner and slid the casserole on the top shelf of the oven. "Now, tell us all about yourself," she went on. "Where you're from and everything."

"Plympton," he said.

"Ah," Mr. Chatfield said. He measured tea into the teapot. "That's near Plymouth, isn't it?"

"It is," agreed Mr. Hurley.

"Terrible!" Mrs. Chatfield said. "Plymouth. I can't bear to think about it."

Mr. Hurley stared at the stove and sniffed appreciatively. "This is all right," he said.

At dinner, by adroit questioning, the Chatfields learned that Mr. Hurley had been at sea for twenty years and, since the war started, had been bombed five times and torpedoed twice. They learned that his wife's name was Florrie and that he had four nippers. He looked at Mrs. Chatfield's smooth, wavy hair. "You have a permanent, haven't you, Ma'am?" he asked. "That's what I tell Florrie she should have. Her hair's a bit stringy."

"Oh," Mrs. Chatfield said.

The doorbell rang before they had finished their tea. It was the two Ryan girls, and within ten minutes the other guests had arrived. Earl Hurley took a chair in a corner of the living room and the rest of the people nodded and smiled at him approvingly.

"Mr. Hurley's been bombed five times and torpedoed twice," Mrs. Chatfield said. The Ryan girls shuddered, and Mrs. Masten said, "It doesn't seem possible, does it? I mean that things like that can happen in this world."

Earl Hurley cleared his throat and everyone was silent. He reached out and took a peppermint from the dish on the table near his chair.

"Mr. Hurley's from Plympton," Mrs. Chatfield said. "That's near Plymouth, you know. He was *in* Plymouth not six months ago."

"Were you indeed?" Dr. Carley asked. "It would be most interesting to hear what it is like now."

Earl swallowed the peppermint and cleared his throat

again. "It's a bit smashed," he said. He took another peppermint.

Mrs. Shelton began to tell about her trip to Bermuda before war was declared—*just* before—and Mrs. Chatfield whispered to her husband, "You go sit next to him, Harry."

Mr. Chatfield drew a chair up next to Earl Hurley, who leaned toward him confidentially. "Once at Brighton," he said, "I saw a young lady with her toenails painted red."

Mr. Chatfield couldn't think of anything to say.

It was almost ten when the telephone rang. Mrs. Chatfield answered it. "Oh, my dear, how awful!" she said. "Of course we can. We can take them both. We'll be right over."

She put the receiver back on its hook and faced the room. "Robert and Libby's pipes have burst," she said. "Their furnace went off in the middle of last night and the man from New Haven never got there to fix it. So their plumbing—well, just doesn't work. And the children—"

"Our son and his wife's pipes have burst," Mr. Chatfield said to Earl Hurley. "They want us to take the children."

"Right," Mr. Hurley said. He got up and left the room.

"I think we'd better go right over and get the children," Mrs. Chatfield said. "Isn't it dreadful!" She went to the hall closet and took down her coat.

Earl Hurley came back into the room. He wore his coat and had wrapped a scarf around his throat. He shook his finger at Mrs. Chatfield. "Now then," he said, "what do you want to be going out in the cold for when you've got two men to wait on you?" He nodded at Mr. Chatfield, who put on his coat, and the men started out the front door to the car.

"Well," Mrs. Chatfield said as the front door closed.

It was a half hour before the two men got back, and the guests had gone. Mr. Chatfield carried the baby and Earl Hurley carried Jody, who was almost three. Jody was wide awake and happy. Earl Hurley set him down on the floor and began to take off his snow suit. "I'm running out of oil," Jody said.

Earl Hurley put his thumb in Jody's ear as though he were pouring something from a spout. "Here you are," he said.

Jody began to chug. "I'm going again," he said.

Mrs. Chatfield took the baby and carried her upstairs. "Harry," she called over her shoulder, "you've got to help me with the bed. It isn't even made up."

Mr. Chatfield looked at Jody, who was running around the room. "Action!" he was yelling. "Action!"

Earl Hurley took a small pair of pliers from his pocket and handed them to Jody. "Tighten your valves," he said.

Mr. Chatfield went upstairs and began to take clean sheets out of the linen closet.

When the bed was made and the baby was asleep, the Chatfields came downstairs. The living room was empty, but they could hear water running in the kitchen. Earl was alone at the sink. The dishes were washed and he was polishing the glasses. Mrs. Chatfield saw that they shone.

"The Chief's in my room," Earl said. "Bedded down. I doubt very much he's asleep."

"Why, Earl," Mrs. Chatfield said. "You shouldn't have bothered. And all those dishes. Harry, he mustn't do such things. All those dishes."

Earl Hurley held a glass to the light and squinted at it. Then he turned and winked at Mr. and Mrs. Chatfield. "I'm a family man," he said.

Date Due

Due	Returned	Due	Returned
APR 14 '70	APR 12 '70 RL		

Women and children first, main
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